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A YEAR'S MINISTRY

FIRST SERIES

A YEAR'S MINISTRY
FIRST SERIES . . by
Alexander Maclaren D.D.

Geo. W. Strothard.

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THE PURIFYING INFLUENCE OF HOPE.

SERMON I.

THE PURIFYING INFLUENCE OF HOPE.

'And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.
1 John iii. 3.

THAT is a very remarkable "and" with which this verse begins. The Apostle has just been touching the very heights of devout contemplation, soaring away up into dim regions where it is very hard to follow,—"We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

And now, without a pause, and linking his thoughts together by a simple "and" he passes from the unimaginable splendours of the Beatific Vision to the plainest practical talk. Mysticism has often soared so high above the earth that it has forgotten to preach righteousness, and therein has been its weak point. But here is the most mystical teacher of the New Testament insisting on plain morality as vehemently as his friend James could have done.

The combination is very remarkable. Like the eagle he rises, and like the eagle, with the impetus gained from his height, he drops right down on the earth beneath!

And that is not only a characteristic of St. John's teaching, but it is a characteristic of all the New Testament morality—its highest revelations are intensely practical. Its light is at once set to work, like the sunshine that comes ninety millions of miles in order to make the little daisies open their crimson-tipped petals; so the profoundest things that the Bible has to say are said to you and me, not that we may know only, but that knowing we may *do*, and *do* because we *are*.

So John, here: "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." "And"—a simple coupling-iron for two such thoughts—"every man that hath this hope in Him,"—that is, in Christ, not in himself, as we sometimes read it—"every man that hath this hope," founded on Christ, "purifies himself even as He is pure."

The thought is a very simple one, though sometimes it is somewhat mistakenly apprehended. Put into its general form it is just this:—If you expect, and expecting, hope to be like Jesus Christ yonder, you will be trying your best to be like Him here. It is not the mere purifying influence of hope that is talked about, but it is the specific influence of this one hope, the hope of ultimate assimilation to Christ leading to strenuous efforts, each a partial resemblance of Him, here and now. And that is the subject I want to say a word or two about this morning.

I.—First, then, notice the principle that is here, which is the main thing to be insisted upon, namely, If we are to be pure, we must purify *ourselves*.

There are two ways of getting like Christ, spoken about in the context. One is the blessed way, that is more appropriate for the higher Heaven, the way of assimilation and transformation by beholding—"If we see Him" we shall be "like Him." That is the blessed method of the Heavens. Yes! but even here on earth it may to some extent be realised. Love always breeds likeness. And there is such a thing, here on earth and now, as gazing upon Christ with an intensity of affection, and simplicity of trust, and rapture of aspiration, and ardour of desire which shall transform us in some measure into His own likeness. John is an example of that for us. It was a true instinct that made the old painters always represent him as like the Master that he sat beside, even in face. Where did John get his style from? He got it by much meditating upon Christ's words. The disciple caught the method of the Master's speech, and to some extent the manner of the Master's vision.

And so he himself stands before us as an instance of the possibility, even on earth, of this calm, almost passive process, and most blessed and holiest method of getting like the Master, by simple gazing, which is the gaze of love and longing.

But, dear brethren, the law of our lives forbids that that should be the only way in which we grow like Christ. "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear" was never meant to be the exhaustive, all-comprehensive statement of the method of Christian progress. You and I are not vegetables; and the Parable of the Seed is only one side of the truth about the method of Christian growth. The very word "purify" speaks to us of another condition; it implies impurity, it implies a process which is more than contemplation, it implies the reversal of existing conditions, and not merely the growth upwards to unattained conditions.

And so growth is not all that Christian men need; they need excision, they need casting out of what is in them; they need change as well as growth. "Purifying" they need because they are impure, and growth is only half the secret of Christian progress.

Then there is the other consideration, viz., if there is to be this purifying it must be done by myself. "Ah!" you say, "done by yourself? That is not Evangelical teaching." Well, let us see. Take two or three verses out of this Epistle which at first sight seem to be contradictory of this. Take the very first that bears on the subject:—"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (i. 7). "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (iv. 9). "He that abideth in Him sinneth not "(iii. 6). "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (v. 4).

Now, if you put all these passages together, and think about the general effect of them, it comes to this: that our best way of cleansing ourselves is by keeping firm hold of Jesus Christ and of the cleansing powers that lie in Him. To take a very homely illustration—soap and water wash your hands clean, and what you have to do is simply to rub the soap and water on to the hand, and bring them into contact with the foulness. You cleanse yourselves. Yes! because without the friction there would not be the cleansing. But is it you, or is it the soap, that does the work? Is it you or the water that makes your hands clean? And so when God comes and says, "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings, your hands are full of blood," He says in effect, "Take the cleansing that I give you and rub it in, and apply it: and your flesh will become as the flesh of a little child, and you shall be clean."

That is to say, the very deepest word about Christian effort of self-purifying is this—keep close to Jesus Christ. You cannot sin as long as you hold His hand. To have Him with you—I mean by that to have the thoughts directed to Him, the love turning to Him, the will submitted to Him, Him consciously with us in the day's work—to have communion with Jesus Christ is like bringing an atmosphere round about us in which all evil will die. If you take a fish out of water and bring it up into the upper air, it writhes and gasps, and is dead presently; and our evil tendencies and sins, drawn up out of the muddy depths in which they live, and brought up into that pure atmosphere of communion with Jesus Christ, are sure to shrivel and to die, and to disappear. We kill all evil by fellowship with the Master. His presence in our lives, by our communion with Him, is like the watch-fire that the traveller lights at night—it keeps all the wild beasts of prey away from the fold.

Christ's fellowship is our cleansing, and the first and main thing that we have to do in order to make ourselves pure is to keep ourselves in union with Him, in whom inhere and abide all the energies that cleanse men's souls. Take the unbleached calico and spread it out on the green grass, and let the blessed sunshine come down upon it, and sprinkle it with fair water; and the grass and the moisture and the sunshine will do all the cleansing, and it will glitter in the light "so as no fuller on earth can white it."

So cleansing is keeping near Jesus Christ. But it is no use getting the mill-race from the stream into your works unless you put wheels in its way to drive. And our holding ourselves in fellowship with the Master in that fashion is not all that we have to do. There have to be distinct and specific efforts, constantly repeated, to subdue and suppress individual acts of transgression. We have to fight against evil, sin by sin. We have not the thing to do all at once; we have to do it in detail. It is a war of outposts, like the last agonies of that Franco-Prussian war, when the Emperor had abdicated, and the country was really conquered, and Paris had yielded, but yet all over the face of the land combats had to be carried on.

So it is with us. Holiness is not feeling; it is character. You do not get rid of your sins by the act of Divine amnesty only. You are not perfect because you say you are, and feel as if you were, and think you are. God does not make any man pure in his sleep. His cleansing does not dispense with fighting, but makes victory possible.

Then, dear brethren, lay to heart this, as the upshot of the whole matter. First of all, let us turn to Him from whom all the cleansing comes; and then, moment by moment, remember that it is our work to purify ourselves by the strength and the power that is given to us by the Master.

II.—The second thought here is this: *This purifying of ourselves is the link or bridge between the present and the future.*—"Now are we the sons of God," says John, in the context. That is the pier upon the one side of the gulf. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but when He is made manifest we shall be like Him." That is the pier on the other. How are the two to be connected? There is only one way by which the present sonship will blossom and fruit into the future perfect likeness, and that is; if we throw across the gulf, by God's help day by day here that bridge of our effort after growing likeness to Himself, and purity therefrom.

That is plain enough, I suppose. To speak in somewhat technical terms, the "law of continuity" that we hear so much about, runs on between earth and Heaven. Which, being translated into plain English, is but this—that the act of passing from the limitations and conditions of this transitory life into the solemnities and grandeurs of that future does not alter a man's character, though it may intensify it. It does not make him different from what he was, though it may make him more of what he was, whether its direction be good or bad.

You take a stick and thrust it into water; and because the rays of light pass from one medium to another of a different density, they are refracted and the stick seems bent; but take the human life out of the thick coarse medium of earth and lift it up into the pure rarefied air of Heaven, and there is no refraction; it runs straight on. Straight on! The given direction continues; and in whatever direction my face is turned when I die, thither my face will be turned when I live again.

Do not you fancy that there is any magic in coffins and graves, and shrouds to make men different from their former selves. The continuity runs clean on, the rail goes without a break, though it goes through the Mont Cenis tunnel; and on the one side is the cold of the North, and on the other the sunny South. The man is the same man through death and beyond.

So the one link between sonship here and likeness to Christ hereafter is this link of present, strenuous effort to become like Him day by day in personal purity. For there is another reason, on which I need not dwell, viz., unless there be this daily effort on our part to become like Jesus Christ by personal purity, we shall not be able to "see Him as He is." Death will take a great many veils off men's hearts. It will reveal to them a great deal that they do not know, but it will not give the faculty of beholding the glorified Christ in such fashion as that the beholding will mean transformation. "Every eye shall see Him," but it is conceivable that a spirit shall be so immersed in self-love and in godlessness that the vision of Christ shall be repellent and not attractive; shall have no transforming and no gladdening power. And I beseech you to remember that about that vision, as about the vision of God Himself, the principle stands true; it is "the pure in heart that shall see God" in Christ. And the change from life to the life beyond will not necessarily transform into the image of His dear Son. You make a link between the present and the future by cleansing your hands and your hearts, through faith in the cleansing power of Christ, and direct effort at holiness.

III.—Now, I must briefly add finally: that *this self-cleansing* of which I have been speaking is the *offspring and outcome of that "hope"* in my text. It is the child of hope. Hope is by no means an active faculty generally. As the poets have it, she may "smile and wave her golden hair;" but she is not in the way of doing much work in the world. And it is not the mere fact of hope that generates this effort; it is, as I have been trying to shew you, a certain kind of hope—the hope of being like Jesus Christ when "we see Him as He is."

I have only two things to say about this matter, and one of them is this: of course, such strenuous effort of purity will only be the result of such a hope as that, because such a hope will fight against one of the greatest of all the enemies of our efforts after purity. There is nothing that makes a man so down-hearted in his work of self-improvement as the constant and bitter experience that it seems to be all of no use; that he is making so little progress; that with immense pains, like a snail creeping up a wall, he gets up, perhaps, an inch or two, and then all at once he drops down, and further down than he was before he started.

Slowly we manage some little patient self-improvement; gradually, inch by inch and bit by bit, we may be growing better, and then there comes some gust and outburst of temptation; and the whole painfully reclaimed soil gets covered up by an avalanche of mud and stones, that we have to remove slowly, barrow load by barrow load. And then we feel that it is all of no use to strive, and we let circumstances shape us, and give up all thoughts of reformation.

To such moods then there comes, like an angel from Heaven, that holy, blessed message, "Cheer up, man! 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is;' Every inch that you make now will tell then, and it it not all of no use. Set your heart to the work, it is a work that will be blessed and will prosper."

Again, here is a test for all you Christian people, who say that you look to Heaven with hope as to your home and rest.

A great deal of the religious contemplation of a future state is pure sentimentality, and like all pure sentimentality is either immoral or non-moral. But here the two things are brought into clear juxtaposition, the bright hope of Heaven and the hard work done here below. Now is that what the gleam and expectation of a future life does for you?

This is the only time in John's Epistle that he speaks about hope. The good man, living so near Christ, finds that the present, with its "abiding in Him," is enough for his heart. And though he was the Seer of the Apocalypse, he has scarcely a word to say about the future in this letter of his and when he does it is for a simple and intensely practical purpose, in order that he may enforce on us the teaching of labouring earnestly in purifying ourselves.

My brother, is that your type of Christianity? Is that the kind of inspiration that comes to you from the hope that steals in upon you in your weary hours, when sorrows, and cares, and changes, and loss, and disappointments, and hard work weigh you down, and you say, "It would be blessed to pass hence"? Does it set you harder at work than anything else can do? Is it all utilised? Or, if I might use such an illustration, is it like the electricity of the Aurora Borealis, that paints your winter sky with vanishing, useless splendours of crimson and blue? or, have you got it harnessed to your tramcars, lighting your houses, driving sewing-machines, doing practical work in your daily life? Is the hope of Heaven, and of being like Christ, a thing that stimulates and stirs us every moment to heroisms of self-surrender and to strenuous martyrdom of self-cleansing?

All is gathered up into the one lesson. First, let us go to that dear Lord whose blood cleanseth from all sin, and let us say to Him, "Purge me, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." And then, receiving into our hearts the powers that purify, in His love and His sacrifice and His life, "having these promises" and these possessions, "Dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord."

"THE BRIDAL OF THE EARTH AND SKY."

SERMON II.

"THE BRIDAL OF THE EARTH AND SKY."

"Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps." Psalm lxxxv. 10-13.

THIS is a lovely and highly imaginative picture of the reconciliation and reunion of God and man, "the bridal of the earth and sky."

The Poet-Psalmist, who seems to have belonged to the times immediately after the Return from the Exile, in strong faith sees before him a vision of a perfectly harmonious co-operation and relation between God and man. He is not prophesying directly of Messianic times. The vision hangs before him, with no definite note of time upon it. He hopes it may be fulfilled in his own day; he is sure it will, if only, as he says, his countrymen "turn not again to folly." At all events, it will be fulfilled in that far-off time to which the heart of every prophet turned with longing. But, more than that, there is no reason why it should not be fulfilled with every man, at the moment.

It is the ideal, to use modern language, of the relations between Heaven and earth. Only that the Psalmist believed that as sure as that there was a God in Heaven, Who is likewise a God working in the midst of the earth, the ideal might become, and would become, a reality.

So, then, I take it, these four verses all set forth substantially the same thought, but with slightly different modifications and applications. They are a four-fold picture of how Heaven and earth ought to blend and harmonise. This four-fold representation of the one thought is what I purpose to consider now.

I.—To begin with, then, take the first verse:—"Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." We have here *the heavenly twin sisters, and the earthly pair that corresponds.* "Mercy and Truth are met together"—that is one personification; "Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other" is another. It is difficult to say whether these four great qualities are to be regarded as all belonging to God, or as all belonging to man, or as all common both to God and man. The first explanation is the most familiar one, but I confess that, looking at the context, where we find throughout an interpenetration and play of reciprocal action as between earth and Heaven, I am disposed to think of the first pair as sisters from the Heavens, and the second pair as the earthly sisters that correspond to them. Mercy and Truth—two radiant angels, like virgins in some solemn choric dance, linked hand in hand, issue from the sanctuary and move amongst the dim haunts of men, making "a sunshine in a shady place," and to them there come forth, linked in a sweet embrace, another pair whose lives depend on the lives of their elder and heavenly sisters, Righteousness and Peace. And so these four, the pair of heavenly origin, and the answering pair that have sprung into being at their coming upon earth ;—these four, banded in perfect accord, move together, blessing and light-giving amongst the sons of men. Mercy and Truth are the Divine—Righteousness and Peace the earthly.

Let me dwell upon these two couples briefly. "Mercy and Truth are met together" means this: That these two qualities are found braided and linked inseparably in all that God does with mankind ; that these two springs are the double fountains from which the great stream of the river of the Water of Life, the forthcoming and the manifestation of God, takes its rise.

"Mercy and Truth." What are the meanings of the two words ? Mercy is love that stoops, love that departs from the strict lines of desert and retribution. Mercy is love that is kind when justice might make it otherwise. Mercy is love that condescends to that which is far beneath. Thus the "Mercy" of the Old Testament covers almost the same ground as the "Grace" of the New Testament.

And Truth blends with the mercy. That is to say—truth in a somewhat narrower than its widest sense, meaning mainly God's fidelity to every obligation under which He has come. God's faithfulness to promise, God's fidelity to His past, God's fidelity, in His actions, to His own character, which is meant by that great word, "He sware by *Himself!*"

Thus the sentiment of mercy, the tender grace and gentleness of that condescending love, has impressed upon it the seal of permanence when we say: Grace and truth, mercy and faithfulness, are met together. No longer is love mere sentiment, which may be capricious and may be transient. We can reckon on it, we know the law of its being. The love is lifted up above the suspicion of being arbitrary, or of ever changing or fluctuating. We do not know all the limits of the orbit.

but we know enough to calculate it for all practical purposes. God has committed Himself to us, He has limited Himself by His obligations, by His own past. We have a right to turn to Him, and say : "Be what Thou art, and continue to us what Thou hast been unto past ages." And He responds to the appeal. For Mercy and Truth, tender, gracious, stooping forgiving love, and inviolable faithfulness that can never be otherwise, these blend in all His works ; "that by two immutable things, wherein it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation."

Again, dear brethren, let me remind you, these two are the ideal two, which, as far as God's will and wish are concerned, are the only two that would mark any of His dealings with men. When He is, if I may so say, left free to do as He would, and is not forced to His "strange act" of punishment by my sin and yours, these, and these only, are the characteristics of His dealings.

Nor let us forget—"We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, *full of grace and truth.*" The Psalmist's vision was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, in whom these sweet twin characteristics, that are linked inseparably in all the works of God, are welded together into one in the living personality of Him who is all the Father's grace embodied ; and is the Way and the Truth and the Life.

Turn now to the other side of this first aspect of the union of God and man. "Mercy and truth are met together," these are the Heavenly twins. "Righteousness and peace have kissed each other"—these are the earthly sisters who sprang into being to meet them.

Of course I know that these words are very often applied, by way of illustration, to the great work of Jesus Christ upon the Cross, which is supposed to have reconciled, if not contradictory, at least divergently working sides of the Divine character and government. And we all know how beautifully the phrase has often been employed by eloquent preachers, and how beautifully it has been often illustrated by devout painters.

But beautiful as the adaptation is, I think it is an adaptation, and not the real meaning of the words, for this reason, if for no other, that righteousness and peace are not in the Old Testament regarded as opposites, but as harmonious and inseparable. And so I take it that here we have distinctly the picture of what happens upon earth when Mercy and Truth that come down from Heaven are accepted and recognised—then Righteousness and Peace kiss each other.

Or, to put away the metaphor, here are two thoughts, first that in men's experience and life *righteousness and peace cannot be rent apart.* The only secret of tranquillity is to be good. "First of all, King of Righteousness, and after that King of Salem, which is the King of Peace." "The effect of Righteousness shall be peace," as Isaiah, the brother in spirit of this Psalmist, says ; and on the other hand, as the same prophet says, "The wicked is like a troubled sea that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt ; there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." But where affections are pure, and the life is worthy, where goodness is loved in the heart, and followed even imperfectly in the daily life, there the ocean is quiet, and "birds of peace sit brooding on the charmed wave." The one secret of tranquillity is first to trust in the Lord and then to do good. Righteousness and peace kiss each other.

The other thought here is that Righteousness and her twin sister, Peace, only come in the measure in which the mercy and the truth of God are received into thankful hearts. My brother, have you taken that mercy and that truth into your soul, and are you trying to reach peace in the only way by which any human being can ever reach it—through the path of righteousness, self-suppression, and consecration to Him?

II.—Now, take the next phase of this union and co-operation of earth and Heaven, which is given here in the 11th verse:—Truth shall spring out of the earth, and Righteousness shall look down from Heaven." That is, to put it into other words—*God responding to man's truth.* Notice that in this verse one member from each of the two pairs that have been spoken about in the previous verse is detached from its companion, and they are joined so as to form for a moment a new pair. Truth is taken from the first couple; Righteousness from the second, and a third couple is thus formed.

And notice, further, that each takes the place that had belonged to the other. The Heavenly Truth becomes a child of earth; and the earthly Righteousness ascends "to look down from Heaven." The process of the previous verse in effect is reversed. "Truth shall spring out of the earth, Righteousness shall look down from Heaven." That is to say: Man's truth shall begin to grow and blossom in answer, as it were, to God's Truth that came down upon it. Which being translated into other words is this: where a man's heart has welcomed the mercy and the truth of God there shall spring up in that heart, not only the righteousness and peace, of which the previous verse is speaking, but specifically a faithfulness not all unlike the faithfulness which it grasps. If we have a God immutable and unchangeable to build upon, let us build upon Him immutability and unchangeableness. If we have a Rock on which to build our confidence, let us see that our confidence that we build upon it is rocklike too. If we have a God that cannot lie, let us grasp His faithful Word with an affiance that cannot falter. If we have a truth in the Heavens, absolute and immutable, on which to anchor our hopes, let us see to it that our hopes, anchored thereon, are sure and steadfast. What a shame it would be that we should bring the vacillations and fluctuations of our own insincerities and changeableness to the solemn, fixed unutterableness of that Divine Word! We ought to be faithful, for we build upon a faithful God.

And then the other side of this second picture. Righteousness shall "look down from Heaven." Not in its judicial aspect merely, but as the perfect moral purity that belongs to the Divine Nature, which shall bend down a loving eye upon the men beneath, and mark the springings of any imperfect good and thankfulness in our hearts; joyous as the husbandman beholds the springing of his crops in the fields that he has sown.

God delights when He sees the first faint flush of green which marks the springing of the good seed in the else barren hearts of men. No good, no beauty of character, no meek rapture of faith, no aspiration Godwards is ever wasted and lost, for His eye rests upon it. As Heaven, with its myriad stars, bends over the lowly earth, and in the midnight when no human eye beholds, sees all, so God sees the hidden confidence, the unseen "truth" that springs to meet His faithful Word. The flowers that grow in the pastures of the wilderness, or away upon the wild prairies, or that hide in the clefts of the inaccessible mountains, do not "waste their sweetness on the desert air" for God sees them.

It may be an encouragement and quickening to us to remember that wherever the tiniest little bit of truth springs upon the earth, the loving eye—not the eye of a great taskmaster—but the eye of the Brother, Christ, which is the eye of God, looks down. "Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing unto Him."

III.—And then there is the third aspect of this ideal relation between earth and Heaven, the converse of the one we have just now been speaking of, set forth in the next verse : "Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good and our land shall yield her increase." That is to say : *man responding to God's gift.* You see that the order of things is reversed in this verse from the former one. It recurs to the order with which we originally started. "The Lord shall give that which is good." In figure, that refers to all the skyey influence of dew, rain, sunshine, passing breezes, and still, ripening autumn days ; in the reality it refers to all the motives, powers, impulses, helps, furtherances by which He makes it possible for us to serve Him and love Him, and bring forth fruits of righteousness.

And so the thought which has already been hinted at is here more fully developed and dwelt upon, this great truth, that earthly fruitfulness is possible only by the reception of Heavenly gifts. As sure as every leaf that grows is mainly water that the plant has got from the clouds, and carbon that it has got out of the atmosphere, so surely will all our good be mainly drawn from Heaven and Heaven's gifts. As certainly as every lump of coal that you put upon your fire contains in itself sunbeams that have been locked up for all these millenniums that have passed since it waved green in the forest, so certainly does every good deed embody in itself gifts from above. And no man is pure except by impartation ; and every good thing and every perfect thing cometh from the Father of Lights.

So let us learn the lesson of absolute dependence for all purity, virtue, and righteousness on His bestowment, and come to Him and ask Him evermore to fill our emptiness with His own gracious fulness, and to lead us to be what He commands and would have us to be.

And then there is the other lesson out of this phase of the ideal relation between earth and Heaven, the lesson of what we ought to do with the gift. "The earth yields her increase," by laying hold of the good which the Lord gives, and by reason of that received good quickening all the germs. Ah! dear brethren, wasted opportunities, neglected moments, uncultivated talents, gifts that are not stirred up; rain and dew and sunshine, all poured upon us and no increase—is not that the story of much of all our lives, and of the whole of some lives?

Are we like Eastern lands where the trees have been felled, and the great irrigation works and tanks have been allowed to fall into disrepair, and so when the bountiful treasure of the rains comes, all that it does is to swell for half a day the discoloured stream that carries away some more of the arable land; and when the sunshine comes, with its swift, warm powers, all that it does is to bleach the stones and scorch the barren sand? "The earth which *drinketh in the rain* that cometh oft upon it, and yieldeth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth the blessing of God." Is it true about you that the earth yieldeth her increase, as it is certainly true that "the Lord giveth that which is good"?

IV.—And now the last thing which is here, the last phase of the fourfold representation of the ideal relation between earth and Heaven, is, "Righteousness shall go before Him and shall set us in the way of His steps." That is to say, *God teaching man to walk in His footsteps.* There is some difficulty about the meaning of the last clause of this verse, but I think that having regard to the whole context and to that idea of the interpenetration of the Heavenly with the human which we have seen running through it, the reading in our English Bible gives substantially, though somewhat freely, the meaning. The clause might literally be rendered "make His footsteps for a way." It comes to substantially the same thing as is expressed in our English Bible. Righteousness, God's moral perfectness, is set forth here in a twofold phase. First as a herald going before Him and preparing His path.

The Psalmist in these words draws tighter than ever the bond between God and man. It is not only that God sends His messengers to the world, nor only that His loving eye looks down upon it, nor only "that he gives that which is good"; but it is that the whole Heaven, as it were, lowers itself to touch earth, that God comes down to dwell and walk among men. The Psalmist's mind is filled with the thought of a present God who moves amongst mankind, and has His "footsteps" on earth. This herald Righteousness prepares God's path, which is just to say that all His dealings with mankind—which, as we have seen, have mercy and faithfulness for their signature and stamp—are rooted and based in perfect rectitude.

The second phase of the operation of righteousness is, that that majestic herald, the Divine purity which moves before Him, and "prepares in the desert a highway for the Lord,"—that that very same righteousness comes and takes my feeble hand, and will lead my tottering footsteps into God's path, and teach me to walk, planting my little foot where He planted His. The highest of all thoughts of the ideal relation between earth and Heaven, that of likeness between God and man, is trembling on the Psalmist's lips. Men may walk in God's ways—not only in the ways that please Him, but in the ways that are like Him. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect."

And the likeness can only be a likeness in moral qualities—a likeness in goodness, a likeness in purity, a likeness in aversion from evil, for the other attributes and characteristics are His peculiar property; and no human brow can wear the crown that He wears. But though

His mercy can but, from afar off, be copied by us, the righteousness that moves before Him, and engineers God's path through the wilderness of the world, will come behind Him and nurselike lay hold of our feeble arms and teach us to go in the way God would have us to walk.

Ah, brethren! That is the crown and climax of the harmony between God and man, that His mercy and His truth, His gifts and His grace have all led us up to this: that we take His righteousness as our pattern, and try in our poor lives to reproduce its wondrous beauty. Do not forget that a great deal more than the Psalmist dreamed of, you Christian men and women possess, in the Christ Who of God is made unto us righteousness, in Whom Heaven and earth are joined for ever, in Whom man and God are knit in strictest bonds of indissoluble friendship; and Who, having prepared a path for God in His mighty mission and by His sacrifice on the Cross, comes to us; and, as the Incarnate Righteousness, will lead us in the paths of God, leaving us an example, that "we should follow in His steps."

THE WORK AND ARMOUR OF THE CHILDREN OF THE DAY.

SERMON III.

THE WORK AND ARMOUR OF THE CHILDREN OF THE DAY.

"Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation." 1 Thes. v. 8.

THIS letter to the Thessalonians is the oldest book of the New Testament. It was probably written within something like twenty years of the Crucifixion; long, therefore, before any of the Gospels were in existence. It is, therefore, exceedingly interesting and instructive to notice how this whole context is saturated with allusions to our Lord's teaching, as it is preserved in these Gospels; and how it takes for granted that the Thessalonian Christians were familiar with the very words.

For instance; "Yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." (Ver. 2.) How did these people in Thessalonica know that? They had been Christians for a year or so only; they had been taught by Paul for a few weeks only, or a month or two at the most. How did they know it? Because they had been told what the Master had said: "If the goodman of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up."

And there are other allusions in the context almost as obvious—"The children of the light." Who said that? Christ, in His words: "The children of this world are wiser than the children of light." "They that sleep, sleep in the night, and if they be drunken, are drunken in the night." Where does that metaphor come from? "Take heed lest at any time ye be over-charged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." "Watch, lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping!"

So you see all the context reposes upon, and presupposes the very words, which you find in our present existing Gospels, as the words of the Lord Jesus. And this is all but cotemporaneous, and quite independent evidence of the existence in the Church, from the beginning, of a traditional teaching respecting Christ in verbal correspondence with the teaching which is now preserved for us in that four-fold record of His life.

Take that remark for what it is worth; and now turn to the text itself with which I have to deal this morning. The whole of the context may be said to be a little dissertation upon the moral and religious uses of the doctrine of our Lord's second coming. In my text these are summed up in one central injunction which has preceding it a motive that enforces it, and following it a method that ensures it. "Let us be sober." That is the centre thought; and it is buttressed upon either side by a motive and a means. "Let us who are of the day," or "since we are of the day,—be sober." And let us *be* it by "putting on the breastplate, and helmet of faith, love, and hope." These, then, are the three points which we have to consider.

I.—First, this central injunction, into which all the moral teaching drawn from the second coming of Christ is gathered—"Let us be sober." Now, I do not suppose we are altogether to omit any reference to the literal meaning of this word. The context seems to shew that, by its reference to night as the season for drunken orgies. Temperance is moderation in regard not only of the evil and swinish sin of drunkenness, which is so manifestly contrary to all Christian integrity and nobility of character, but in regard of the far more subtle temptation of another form of sensual indulgence—gluttony. The Christian Church needed to be warned of that, and if these people in Thessalonica needed the warning I am quite sure that we need it. There is not a nation on earth which needs it more than Englishmen. I am no ascetic, I do not want to glorify any outward observance, but any doctor in England will tell you that the average Englishman eats and drinks a great deal more than is good for him. It is melancholy to think how many professing Christians have the edge and keenness of their intellectual and spiritual life blunted by the luxurious and senseless table-abundance in which they habitually indulge. I am quite sure that water from the spring and barley-bread would be a great deal better for their souls and for their bodies too, in the case of many people that call themselves Christians. Suffer a word of exhortation! and do not let it be neglected because it is brief and general. Sparta, after all, is the best place for a man to live in, next to Jerusalem.

But, passing from that, let us turn to the higher subject with which the Apostle is here evidently mainly concerned. What is the meaning of the exhortation "Be sober?" Well, first let me tell you what I think is not the meaning of it. It does not mean an unemotional absence of fervour in your Christian character.

There is a kind of religious teachers who are always preaching down enthusiasm, and preaching up what they call a "sober standard of feeling" in matters of religion. By which, in nine cases out of ten, they mean precisely such a tepid condition as is described in much less polite language; when the Voice from Heaven says, "Because thou art neither cold nor hot I will spue thee out of My mouth." That is the real meaning of the "sobriety" that some people are always desiring you to cultivate. I should have thought that the last piece of furniture which any Christian Church in the nineteenth century needed was a refrigerator! A poker and a pair of bellows would be very much more needful for them. For, dear brethren, the truths that you and I profess to believe are of such a nature, so tremendous either in their joyfulness and beauty, or in their solemnity and awfulness, that one would think that if they once got into a man's head and heart, nothing but the most fervid and continuous glow of a radiant enthusiasm would correspond to their majesty and overwhelming importance. I venture to say that the only consistent Christian is the enthusiastic Christian; and that the only man that will ever do anything in this world for God or man worth doing, is the man who is not *sober*, according to that cold-blooded definition which I have been speaking about, but who is all ablaze with an enkindled earnestness that knows no diminution and no cessation.

Paul, the very man that is exhorting here to sobriety, was the very type of an enthusiast all his life. So Festus thought him mad, and even in the Church at Corinth there were some to whom in his fervour, he seemed to be "beside himself." (2 Cor. v. 13.)

Oh! for more of that insanity! You may make up your minds to this; that any men or women that are in thorough earnest, either about Christianity or about any other great, noble, lofty, self-forgetting purpose, will have to be content to have the old Pentecostal charge flung at them :—"These men are full of new wine!" Well for the Church, and well for the men who deserve the taunt; for it means that they have learned something of the emotion that corresponds to such magnificent and awful verities as Christian faith converses with.

I did not intend to say so much about that; I turn now for a moment to the consideration of what this exhortation really means. It means, as I take it, mainly this: the prime Christian duty of self-restraint in the use and the love of all earthly treasures and pleasures.

I need not do more than remind you how, in the very make of a man's soul, it is clear that unless there be exercised rigid self-control he will go all to pieces. The make of human nature, if I may so say, shews that it is not meant for a democracy but a monarchy.

Here are within us many passions, tastes, desires, most of them rooted in the flesh, which are as blind as hunger and thirst are. If a man is hungry, the bread will satisfy him all the same whether he steals it or not; and it will not necessarily be distasteful even if it be poisoned. And there are other blind impulses and appetites in our nature which ask nothing except this :—"Give me my appropriate gratification, though all the laws of God and man be broken in order to get it!"

And so there has to be something like an eye given to these blind beasts, and something like a directing hand laid upon these instinctive impulses. The true temple of the human spirit must be built in stages, the broad base laid in these animal instincts; above them and controlling them the directing and restraining will; above it the understanding which enlightens it and them; and supreme over all the conscience with nothing between it and Heaven. Where that is not the order of the inner man, you get wild work. You have set "beggars on horseback," and we all know where they go! The man who lets passion and inclination guide is like a steamboat with all the furnaces banked up, with the engines going full speed, and nobody at the wheel. It will drive on to the rocks, or wherever the bow happens to point, no matter though death and destruction lie beyond the next turn of the screw. That is what you will come to unless you live in the habitual exercise of rigid self-control.

And that self-control is to be exercised mainly, or at least as one very important form of it, in regard of our use and estimate of the pleasures of this present life. Yes! it is not only from the study of a man's make that the necessity for a very rigid self-government appears, but the observation of the conditions and circumstances in which he is placed points the same lesson. All round about him are hands reaching out to him drugged cups. The world with all its fading sweets comes tempting him, and the old fable fulfils itself—Whoever takes that Circe's cup and puts it to his lips and quaffs deep, turns into a swine, and sits there imprisoned at the feet of the sorceress for evermore!

There is only one thing that will deliver you from that fate, my brother. "Be sober" and in regard of the world and all that it offers to us—all joy, possession, gratification—"set a knife to thy throat if thou be a man given to appetite." There is no noble life possible on any other terms—not to say there is no Christian life possible on any other terms—but suppression and mortification of the desires of the flesh and of the spirit. You cannot look upwards and downwards at the same moment. Your heart is only a tiny room after all, and if you cram it full of the world, you relegate your Master to the stable outside. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." "Be sober," says Paul, then, and cultivate the habit of rigid self-control in regard of this present. Oh! what a melancholy, solemn thought it is that hundreds of professing Christians in England, like vultures after a full meal, have so gorged themselves with the garbage of this present life that they cannot fly, and have to be content with moving along the ground, heavy and languid. Christian men and women, are you keeping yourselves in spiritual health by a very sparing use of the dainties and delights of earth? Answer the question to your own souls and to your Judge.

II.—And now let me turn to the other thoughts that lie here. There is, secondly, a motive which backs up and buttresses this exhortation. "Let us who are of the day"—or as the Revised Version has it a little more emphatically and correctly, "Let us, since we are of the day, be sober." "The day;" what day? The temptation is to answer the question by saying—"of course the specific day which was spoken about in the beginning of the section, 'the day of the Lord,' that coming judgment by the coming Christ." But I think that although, perhaps, there may be some allusion here to that specific day, still, if you will look at the verses which immediately precede my text, you will see that in them the Apostle has passed from the thought of "the day of the Lord" to that of day in general. That is obvious, I think, from the contrast he draws between the "day" and the "night" the darkness and the light. If so, then, when he says "the children of the day" he does not so much mean—though that is quite true—that we are, as it were, akin to that Day of Judgment, and may therefore look forward to it without fear, and in quiet confidence, lifting up our heads because our redemption draws nigh; but rather he means that Christians are the children of that which expresses knowledge, and joy, and activity. Of these things the day is the emblem, in every language and in every poetry.

The day is the time when men see and hear, the symbol of gladness and cheer all the world over.

And so, says Paul, you Christian men and women belong to a joyous realm, a realm of light and knowledge, a realm of purity and righteousness. You are children of the light; a glad condition which involves many glad and noble issues. Children of the light should be brave, children of the light should not be afraid of the light, children of the light should be cheerful, children of the light should be buoyant, children of the light should be transparent, children of the light should be hopeful, children of the light should be pure, and children of the light should walk in this darkened world, bearing their radiance with them; and making things, else unseen, visible to many a dim eye.

But while these emblems of cheerfulness, hope, purity, and illumination are gathered together in that grand name—"Ye are children of the day," there is one direction especially in which the Apostle thinks that that consideration ought to tell, and that is the direction of its self-restraint. "*Noblesse oblige!*"—the aristocracy are bound to do nothing low or dishonourable. The children of the light are not to stain their hands with anything foul. Chambering and wantonness, slumber and drunkenness, the indulgence in the appetites of the flesh,—all that may be fitting for the night, it is clean incongruous with the day.

Well, if you want that turned into pedestrian prose—which is no more clear but a little less emotional—it is just this: You Christian men and women belong—if you are Christians—to another state of things from that which is lying round about you; and therefore you ought to live in rigid abstinence from these things that are round about you.

That is plain enough surely, nor do I suppose that I need to dwell on that thought at any length. We belong to another order of things, says Paul; we carry a day with us in the midst of the night. What follows from that? Do not let us pursue the wandering lights and treacherous will-o'-the-wisps that lure men into bottomless bogs where they are lost. If we have light in our dwellings whilst Egypt lies in darkness, let it teach us to eat our meat with our loins girded, and our staves in our hands, not without bitter herbs, and ready to go forth into the wilderness. You do not belong to the world in which you live, if you are Christian men and women; you are only camped here. Your purposes, thoughts, hopes, aspirations, treasures, desires, delights, go up higher. And so, if you are children of the day, b self-restrained in your dealings with the darkness.

III.—And, last of all, my text points out for us a method by which this great precept may be fulfilled:—"Putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation."

That, of course, is the first rough draft, occurring in Paul's earliest epistle, of an image which recurs at intervals and in more or less expanded form in other of his letters, and is so splendidly worked out in detail in the grand picture of the Christian armour in the Epistle to the Ephesians.

I need not do more than just remind you of the difference between that finished picture and this out-line sketch. Here we have only defensive and not offensive armour, here the Christian graces are somewhat differently allocated to the different parts of the armour. Here we have only the great triad of Christian graces, so familiar on our lips—faith, hope, charity. Here we have faith and love in the closest possible juxtaposition, and hope somewhat more apart; the breastplate, like some of the ancient hauberks, made of steel and gold, is framed and forged out of faith and love blended together And faith and love are more closely identified in fact than faith and hope, or than love and hope. For faith and love have the same object—and are all but cotemporaneous. Wherever a man lays hold of Jesus Christ by faith, there cannot but spring up in his heart love to Christ; and there is no love without faith. So that we may almost say that faith and love are but the two throws of the shuttle, the one in the one direction and the other in the other; whereas hope comes somewhat later in a somewhat remoter connection with faith, and has a somewhat different object from these other two. Therefore it is here slightly separated from its sister graces. Faith, love, hope,—these three form the defensive armour that guard the soul; and these three make self-control possible. Like a diver in his dress, who is let down to the bottom of the wild, far-weltering ocean, a man whose heart is girt by faith and charity, and whose head is covered with the helmet of hope, may be dropped down into the wildest sea of temptation and of worldliness, and yet will walk dry and unharmed through the midst of its depths, and breathe air that comes from a world above the restless surges.

And in like manner the cultivation of faith, charity, and hope is the best means for securing the exercise of sober self-control.

It is an easy thing to say to a man, "Govern yourself!" It is a very hard thing with the powers that any man has at his disposal to do it. As somebody said about an army joining the rebels, "It's a bad job when the extinguisher catches fire!" And that is exactly the condition of things in regard to our power of self-government. The powers that should control are largely gone over to the enemy, and become traitors.

"Who shall keep the very keepers?" is the old question, and here is the answer:—You cannot execute the gymnastic feat of "erecting yourself above yourself" any more than a man can take himself by his own coat collar and lift himself up from the ground with his own arms. But you can cultivate faith, hope, and charity, and these three, well cultivated and brought to bear upon your daily life, will do the governing for you. Faith will bring you into communication with all the power of God. Love will lead you into a region where all the temptations round you will be touched as by an Ithuriel spear, and will shew their own foulness. And Hope will turn away your eyes from looking at the tempting splendour around, and fix them upon the glories that are above.

And so the reins will come into your hands in an altogether new manner, and you will be able to be king over your own nature in a fashion that you did not dream of before, if only you will trust in Christ, and love Him, and fix your desires on the things above.

Then you will be able to govern yourself when you let Christ govern you. The glories that are to be done away that gleam round you like foul, flaring tallow-candles, will lose all their fascination and brightness, by reason of the glory that excelleth, the pure starlike splendour of the white inextinguishable lights of Heaven.

And when by Faith, Charity and Hope you have drunk of the new wine of the Kingdom, the drugged and opiate cup which a sorceress world presents, jewelled though it be, will lose its charms, and it will not be hard to turn from it and dash it to the ground.

God help you, brother, to be "sober," for unless you are "you cannot see the Kingdom of God!"

THE LAST BEATITUDE OF THE ASCENDED CHRIST.

SERMON IV.

THE LAST BEATITUDE OF THE ASCENDED CHRIST.

"Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the Tree of Life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Rev. xxii. 14.

THE Revised Version reads, "Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the Tree of Life."

That may seem a very large change to make, from "keep his commandments" to "wash their robes," but in the Greek it is only a change of three letters in one word, one in the next, and two in the third. And the two phrases, written, look so like each other that a scribe hasty, or, for the moment, careless, might very easily mistake the one for the other. There can be no doubt whatever that the reading in the Revised Version is the correct one. Not only is it sustained by a great weight of authority, but also it is far more in accordance with the whole teaching of the New Testament than that which stands in our Authorised Version.

"Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they might have right to the Tree of Life," carries us back to the old law, and has no more hopeful a sound in it than the thunders of Sinai. If it were, indeed, amongst Christ's last words to us, it would be a most sad instance of His "building again the things He had destroyed." It is relegating us to the dreary old round of trying to earn Heaven by doing good deeds; and I might almost say it is "making the Cross of Christ of none effect." The fact that that corrupt reading came so soon into the Church and has held its ground so long, is to me a very singular proof of the difficulty which men have always had in keeping themselves up to the level of the grand central Gospel-truth: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by His mercy, He saved us."

"Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have right to the Tree of Life," has the clear ring of the New Testament music about it, and is in full accord with the whole type of doctrine that runs through this book; and is not unworthy to be almost the last word that the lips of the Incarnate Wisdom spoke to men from Heaven. So then, taking that point of view, I wish to look with you at the three things that come plainly out of these words:—First, that principle that if men are clean it is because they are cleansed; "Blessed are they that wash their robes." Secondly, It is the cleansed who have unrestrained access to the source of life. And lastly, It is the cleansed that pass into the society of the city. Now, let me deal with these three things:—

First, If we are clean it is because we have been made so. The first beatitude that Jesus Christ spoke from the mountain was, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The last beatitude that He speaks from Heaven is, "Blessed are they that wash their robes." And the act commended in the last is but the outcome of the spirit extolled in the first. For they who are poor in spirit are such as know themselves to be sinful men; and those who know themselves to be sinful men are they who will cleanse their robes in the blood of Jesus Christ.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how continually this symbol of the robe is used in Scripture as an expression for moral character. This Book of the Apocalypse is saturated through and through with Jewish implications and allusions, and there can be no doubt whatever that in this metaphor of the cleansing of the robes there is an allusion to that vision that the Apocalyptic seer of the Old Covenant, the prophet Zecharias, had when he saw the High Priest standing before the altar clad in foul raiment, and the word came forth, "Take away the filthy garments from him." Nor need I do more than remind you how the same metaphor is often on the lips of our Lord Himself, notably in the story of the man that had not on the wedding garment, and in the touching and beautiful incident in the parable of the Prodigal Son, where the exuberance of the father's love bids them cast the best robe round the rags and the leanness of his long-lost boy. Nor need I remind you how Paul catches up the metaphor, aud is continually referring to an investing and a divesting—the putting on and the putting off of the new and the old man. In this same Book of the Apocalypse, we see, gleaming all through it, the white robes of the purified soul: "They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy." "I beheld a great multitude, whom no man could number, who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

And so there are gathered up into these last words, all these allusions and memories, thick and clustering, when Christ speaks from Heaven and says, "Blessed are they that wash their robes."

Well then, I suppose we may say roughly, in our more modern phraseology, that the robe thus so frequently spoken of in Scripture answers substantially to what we call character. It is not exactly the man—and yet it is the man. It is the self—and yet it is a kind of projection and making visible of the self, the vesture which is cast round "the hidden man of the heart."

This mysterious robe, which answers nearly to what we mean by character, is made by the wearer.

That is a solemn thought. Every one of us, carries about with him a mystical loom, and we are always weaving—weave, weave, weaving—this robe which we wear, every thought a thread of the warp, every action a thread of the weft. We weave it, as the spider does its web, out of its own entrails, if I might so say. We weave it, and we dye it, and we cut it, and we stitch it, and then we put it on and wear it, and it sticks to us. Like a snail that crawls about your garden patches, and makes its shell by a process of secretion from out of its own substance so you and I are making that mysterious, solemn thing that we call character, moment by moment It is our own self, modified by our actions. Character is the precipitate from the stream of conduct which, like the Nile Delta, gradually rises solid and firm above the parent river and confines its flow.

The next step that I ask you to take is one that I know some of you do not like to take, and it is this: All the robes are foul. I do not say all are equally splashed, I do not say all equally thickly spotted with the flesh. I do not wish to talk dogmas, I wish to talk experience; and I appeal to your own consciences, with this plain question, that every man and woman amongst us can answer if they like—Is it true or is it not, that the robe is all dashed with mud caught on the foul ways, with stains in some of us of rioting and banqueting and revelry and drunkenness; sins of the flesh that have left their marks upon the flesh; but with all of us grey and foul as compared with the whiteness of His robe who sits above us there?

Ah! would that I could bring to all hearts that are listening to me now, whether the hearts of professing Christians or no, that consciousness more deeply than we have ever had it, of how full of impurity and corruption our characters are. I do not charge you with crimes ; I do not charge you with guilt in the world's eyes, but, if we seriously ponder over our past, have we not lived, some of us habitually, all of us far too often, as if there were no God at all, or as if we had nothing to do with Him ? and is not that godlessness, practical Atheism, the fountain of all foulness from which black brooks flow into our lives, and stain our robes ?

The next step is, the foul robe can be cleansed. My text does not go any further in a statement of the method, but it rests upon the great words of this Book of the Revelation, which I have already quoted for another purpose, in which we read "they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." And the same writer, in his Epistle, has the same paradox, which seems to have been, to him, a favourite way of putting the central Gospel-truth :—"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin." John saw the paradox, and saw that the paradox helped to illustrate the great truth that He was trying to proclaim, that the red blood whitened the black robe, and that in its full tide there was a limpid river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the Cross of Christ.

Guilt can be pardoned, character can be sanctified. Guilt can be pardoned ! Men say : "No ! We live in a universe of inexorable laws : 'What a man soweth that he must also reap.' If he has done wrong he must inherit the consequences."

But the question whether guilt can be pardoned or not has only to do very remotely with consequences. The question is not whether we live in a universe of inexorable laws, but whether there is anything in the universe but the laws; for forgiveness is a personal act and has only to do secondarily and remotely with the consequences of a man's doings. So that, if we believe in a personal God, and believe that He has got any kind of living relation to men at all, we can believe—blessed be His name! —in the doctrine of forgiveness; and leave the inexorable laws full scope to work, according as His wisdom and His mercy may provide. For the heart of the Christian doctrine of pardon does not touch those laws, but the heart of it is this: "O Lord! Thou wast angry with me, but Thine anger is turned away, Thou hast comforted me!" So guilt may be pardoned.

Character may be sanctified and elevated. Why not, if you can bring a sufficiently strong new force to bear upon it? And you can bring such a force, in the blessed thought of Christ's death for me, and in the gift of His love. There is such a force in the thought that He has given Himself for our sin. There is such a force in the Spirit of Christ given to us through His death to cleanse us by His presence in our hearts. And so I say, the blood of Jesus Christ, the power of His sacrifice and Cross, cleanses from all sin, both in the sense of taking away all my guilt, and in the sense of changing my character into something loftier and nobler and purer.

Men and women! Do you believe that? If you do not, why do you not? If you do, are you trusting to what you believe, and living the life that befits the confidence?

One word more. The washing of your robes has to be done by you. "Blessed are they that wash their robes." On one hand is all the fulness of cleansing, on the other is the heap of dirty rags that will not be cleansed by you sitting there and looking at them. You must bring the two into contact. How? By the magic band that unites strength and weakness, purity and foulness, the

Saviour and the penitent; the magic band of simple affiance, and trust and submission of myself to the cleansing power of His death and of His life.

Only remember, "Blessed are they that *are washing*," as the Greek might read. Not once and for all, but a continuous process, a blessed process running on all through a man's life.

These are the conditions as they come from Christ's own lips, in almost the last words that human ears, either in fact or in vision, heard Him utter. These are the conditions under which noble life, and at last Heaven are possible for men, namely, that their foul characters shall be cleansed, and that continuously, by daily recurrence and recourse to the Fountain opened in His sacrifice and death.

Friends, you may know much of the beauty and nobleness of Christianity, you may know much of the tenderness and purity of Christ but if you have not apprehended Him in this character, there is an inner sanctuary yet to be trod, of which your feet know nothing, and the sweetest sweetness of all you have not yet tasted, for it is His forgiving love and cleansing power that most deeply manifest His Divine affection and bind us to Himself.

II.—The second thought that I would suggest is that these cleansed ones, and by implication these only, have unrestrained access to the source of life: "Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have right 'to the Tree of Life.'" That, of course, carries us back to the old mysterious narrative at the beginning of the Book of Genesis.

Although it does not bear very closely upon my present subject, I cannot help pausing to point out one thing, how remarkable and how beautiful it is that the last page of the Revelation should come bending round to touch the first page of Genesis. The history of man began with angels with frowning faces and flaming swords barring the way to the Tree of Life. It ends here with the guard of Cherubim withdrawn; or rather, perhaps, sheathing their swords and becoming guides to the no longer forbidden fruit, instead of being its guards. That is the Bible's grand symbolical way of saying that all between—the sin, the misery, the death, is a parenthesis. God's purpose is not going to be thwarted, and the end of His majestic march through human history is to be men's access to the Tree of Life from which, for the dreary ages,—that are but as a moment in the great eternities—they were barred out by their sin.

However, that is not the point that I meant to say a word about. The Tree of Life stands as the symbol here of an external source of life. I take "life" to be used here in what I believe to be its predominant New Testament meaning, not bare continuance in existence, but a full blessed perfection and activity of all the faculties and possibilities of the man, which this very Apostle himself identifies with the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ. And that life, says John, has an external source in Heaven as on earth.

There is an old Christian legend, absurd as a legend, beautiful as a parable, that the cross on which Christ was crucified was made out of the wood of the Tree of Life. It is true in idea, for He and His work will be the source of all life, for earth and for Heaven, whether of body, soul, or spirit. They that wash their robes have the right of unrestrained access to Him in Whose presence, in that loftier state, no impurity can live.

I need not dwell upon the thought that is involved here, of how, whilst on earth and in the beginnings of the Christian career, life is the basis of righteousness; in that higher world, in a very profound sense, righteousness is the condition of fuller life.

The Tree of Life, according to some of the old Rabbinical legends, lifted its branches, by an indwelling motion, high above impure hands that were stretched to touch them, and until our hands are cleansed through faith in Jesus Christ, its richest fruit hangs unreachable, golden, above our heads. Oh! brother, the fulness of the life of Heaven is only granted to them who, drawing near Jesus Christ by faith on earth, have thereby cleansed themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.

III.—Finally, those who are cleansed, and they only, have entrance into the society of the city.

There again we have a whole series of Old and New Testament metaphors gathered together. In the old world the whole power and splendour of great kingdoms was gathered in their capitals, Babylon and Nineveh in the past, Rome in the present. To John the forces of evil were all concentrated in that city on the Seven Hills. To him the antagonistic forces which were the hope of the world, were all concentrated in the real ideal city which he expected to come down from Heaven—the New Jerusalem. And he and his brother who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, whoever *he* was—trained substantially in the same school—have taught us the same lesson that our picture of the future is not to be of a solitary or self-regarding Heaven, but of "a city which hath foundations."

Genesis began with a garden, man's sin sent him out of the garden. God, out of evil, evolves good, and for the lost garden comes the better thing, the found city. "Then comes the statelier Eden back to man." For surely it is better that men should live in the activities of the city than in the sweetness and indolence of the garden; and manifold and miserable as are the sins and the sorrows of great cities, the opprobria of our modern so-called civilisation, yet still the aggregation of great masses of men for worthy objects generates a form of character, and sets loose energies and activities which no other kind of life could have produced.

And so I believe a great step in progress is set forth when we read of the final condition of mankind as being their assembling in the city of God. And surely there, amidst the solemn troops and sweet societies, the long-loved, long-lost, will be found again. I cannot believe that like the Virgin and Joseph, we shall have to go wandering up and down the streets of Jerusalem when we get there, looking for our dear ones. "Wist ye not that I should be in the Father's house?" We shall know where to find them.

"We shall clasp them again,
And with God be the rest."

The city is the emblem of security and of permanence. No more shall life be as a desert march, with changes which only bring sorrow, and yet a dreary monotony amidst them all. We shall dwell amid abiding realities, ourselves fixed in unchanging, but ever growing completeness and peace. The tents shall be done with, we shall inhabit the solid mansions of the city which hath foundations, and shall wonderingly exclaim, as our unaccustomed eyes gaze on their indestructible strength, "What manner of stones, and what buildings are here!"—and not one stone of these shall ever be thrown down.

Dear friends! the sum of all my poor words now is the earnest beseeching of every one of you to bring all your foulness to Christ, who alone can make you clean. "Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." Submit yourselves, I pray you, to its purifying power, by humble faith. Then you will have the true possession of the true life to-day, and will be citizens of the city of God, even while in this far-off dependency of that great metropolis. And when the moment comes for you to leave this prison-house, an angel "mighty and beauteous, though his face be hid," shall come to you, as once of old to the sleeping Apostle. His touch shall wake you, and lead you, scarce knowing where you are or what is happening, from the sleep of life, past the first and second ward, and through the iron gate that leadeth unto the city. Smoothly it will turn on its hinges, opening to you of its own accord, and then you will come to yourself and know of a surety that the Lord hath sent His angel, and that he has led you into the home of your heart, the city of God, which they enter as its fitting inhabitants who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb.

LUTHER—A STONE ON THE CAIRN.

SERMON V.

LUTHER—A STONE ON THE CAIRN.

"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers and saw corruption. But He, Whom God raised again, saw no corruption." (Acts xiii. 36, 37).

I TAKE these words as a motto rather than as a text. You will have anticipated the use which I purpose to make of them in connection witn the Luther Commemoration. They set before us, in clear sharp contrast, the distinction between the limited transient work of the servants and the unbounded, eternal influence of the Master. The former are servants, and that but for a time; they do their work, they are laid in the grave, and as their bodies resolve into their elements, so their influence, their teaching, the institutions which they may have founded, disintegrate and decay. He lives. His relation to the world is not as theirs; He is "not for an age, but for all time." Death is not the end of His work. His Cross is the eternal foundation of the world's hope. His life is the ultimate, perfect revelation of the Divine Nature which can never be surpassed, or fathomed, or antiquated. Therefore, the last thought, in all commemorations of departed teachers and guides, should be of Him Who gave them all the force that they had; and the final word should be; "they were not suffered to continue by reason of death, this Man continueth ever."

In the same spirit, then, as the words of my text, and taking them as giving me little more than a starting-point and a framework I draw from them some thoughts appropriate to the occasion.

I.—First, we have to think about the limited and transient work of this great servant of God.

The miner's son, that was born in that little Saxon village, four hundred years ago, presents at first sight a character singularly unlike the traditional type of mediæval Church fathers and saints. Their ascetic habits, and the repressive system under which they were trained, withdraw them from our sympathy ; but this sturdy peasant, with his full-blooded humanity, unmistakeably a man, and a man all round, is a new type, and looks strangely out of place amongst doctors and mediæval saints.

His character, though not complex is many-sided and in some respects contradictory. The face and figure that look out upon us from the best portraits of Luther, tell us a great deal about the man. Strong, massive, not at all elegant ; he stands there, firm and resolute, on his own legs, grasping a *Bible* in a muscular hand. There is plenty of animalism—a source of power as well as of weakness—in the thick neck ; an iron will in the square chin ; eloquence on the full, loose lips ; a mystic, dreamy tenderness and sadness in the steadfast eyes—altogether a true king and a leader of men !

He was no mere brave revolutionary, he was a cultured scholar, abreast of all the learning of his age, capable of logic-chopping and scholastic disputation on occasion, and but too often the victim of his own over subtle refinements. He was a poet, with a poet's dreaminess and waywardness, fierce alternations of light and shade, sorrow and joy. All living things whispered and spoke to him, and he walked in communion with them all. Little children gathered round his feet, and he had a big heart of love for all the weary and the sorrowful.

Everybody knows how he could write and speak. He made the German language, as we may say, lifting it up from a dialect of boors to become the rich, flexible, cultured speech that it is. And his Bible, his single-handed work, is one of the colossal achievements of man; like Stonehenge or the Pyramids. "His words were half-battles," "they were living creatures that had hands and feet"; his speech, direct, strong, homely, ready to borrow words from the kitchen or the gutter, is unmatched for popular eloquence and impression. There was music in the man. His flute solaced his lonely hours in his home at Wittemberg; and the Marseillaise of the Reformation, as that grand hymn of his has been called, came, words and music, from his heart. There was humour in him, coarse horseplay often; an honest, hearty, broad laugh frequently, like that of a Norse god! There were coarse tastes in him, tastes of the peasant folk from whom he came, which clung to him through life, and kept him in sympathy with the common people, and intelligible to them. And withal, there was a constitutional melancholy, aggravated by his weary toils, perilous fightings, and fierce throes, which led him down often into the deep mire where there was no standing; and which sighs through all his life. The penitential psalms and Paul's wail: "O! wretched man that I am," perhaps never woke more plaintive echo in any human heart than they did in Martin Luther's.

Faults he had, gross and plain as the heroic mould in which he was cast. He was vehement and fierce often; he was coarse and violent often. He saw what he did see so clearly, that he was slow to believe that there was anything that he did not see. He was oblivious of counterbalancing considerations, and given to exaggerated, incautious, unguarded statements of precious truths. He too often aspired to be a driver rather than a leader of men: and his strength of will became obstinacy and tyranny. It was too often true that he had dethroned the Pope of Rome to set up a pope at Wittemberg. And foul personalities came from his lips, according to the bad controversial fashion of his day, which permitted a license to scholars that we now forbid to fishwives.

All that has to be admitted; and when it is all admitted, what then? This is a fastidious generation; Erasmus is its heroic type a great deal more than Luther—I mean amongst the cultivated classes of our day,—and that very largely because in Erasmus there is no quick sensibility to religious emotion as there is in Luther, and no inconvenient fervour. The faults are there—coarse, plain, palpable—and perhaps more than enough has been made of them. Let us remember—as to violence—that he was following the fashion of the day; that he was fighting for his life; that when a man is at death grips with a tiger he may be pardoned if he strikes without considering whether he is going to spoil the skin or not; and that, on the whole you cannot throttle snakes in a graceful attitude. Men fought then with bludgeons; they fight now with dainty polished daggers, dipped in cold colourless poison of sarcasm. Perhaps there was less malice in the rougher old way than in the new.

The faults are there, and nobody that was not a fool would think of painting that homely Saxon peasant-monk's face without the warts and the wrinkles. But it is quite as unhistorical, and a great deal more wicked, to paint nothing but the warts and wrinkles ; to rake all the faults together and make the most of them ; and present them in answer to the question : "What sort of a man was Martin Luther ?"

As to the work that he did, like the work of all of us, it had its limitations, and it will have its end. The impulse that he communicated, like all impulses that are given from men, will wear out its force. New questions will arise, of which the dead leaders never dreamed, and in which they can give no counsel. The perspective of theological thought will alter, the centre of interest will change, a new dialect will begin to be spoken. So it comes to pass that all religious teachers and thinkers are left behind, and that their words are preserved and read rather for their antiquarian and historical interest, than because of any impulse or direction for the present which may linger in them ; and if they founded institutions, these too, in their time, will crumble and disappear.

But I do not mean to say that the truths which Luther rescued from the dust of centuries, and impressed upon the conscience of Teutonic Europe, are getting antiquated. I only mean that his connection with them and his way of putting them, had its limitations and will have its end ;—"This man, having served his own generation by the will of God, was gathered to his fathers, and saw corruption."

What *were* the truths, what was his contribution to the illumination of Europe, and to the Church ? Three great principles,—which perhaps closer analysis might reduce to one ; but which for popular use, on such an occasion as the present, had better be kept apart,—will state his service to the world.

There were three men in the past who, as it seems to me, reach out their hands to one another across the centuries—Paul, St. Augustine, and Martin Luther. Three men very like each other, all three of them joining the same subtle speculative power with the same capacity of religious fervour, and of flaming up at the contemplation of Divine truth. All of them gifted with the same exuberant, and to fastidious eyes, incorrect eloquence. All three trained in a school of religious thought of which each respectively was destined to be the antagonist and all but the destroyer.

The young Pharisee, on the road to Damascus, blinded, bewildered, with all that vision flaming upon him, sees in its light his past, that he thought had been so pure, and holy, and God-serving, and amazedly discovers that it had been all a sin and a crime, and a persecution of the Divine One. Beaten from every refuge, and lying there, he cries: "What wouldst Thou have me to do, Lord?"

The young Manichean and profligate in the fourth century, and the young monk in his convent in the 15th, passed through a similiar experience;—different in form, identical in substance—with that of Paul, the persecutor. And so Paul's gospel, which was the description and explanation, the rationale of his own experience, became their gospel; and when Paul said:—"Not by works of righteousness which our own hands have done, but by His mercy He saved us" (Titus iii. 5), the great voice from the North African shore, in the midst of the agonies of barbarian invasions and a falling Rome, said "Amen." "Man lives by faith," and the voice from the Wittemberg convent, a thousand years after, amidst the unspeakable corruption of that phosphorescent and decaying renaissance, answered across the centuries, "It is true!" "Herein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." Luther's word to the world was Augustine's word to the world; and Luther and Augustine were the echoes of Saul of Tarsus—and Paul learned his theology on the Damascus road, when the voice bade him go and proclaim "forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me." (Acts xxvi. 18.) That is Luther's first claim on our gratitude, that he took this truth from the shelves where it had reposed, dust-covered, through centuries, that he lifted this truth from the bier where it had lain, smothered with sacerdotal garlands, and called with a loud voice, "I say unto thee, arise!" and that now the commonplace of Christianity is this—All men are sinful men, justice condemns us all. Our only hope is God's infinite mercy. That mercy comes to us all in Jesus Christ that died for us, and he that gets that into his heart by simple faith, he is forgiven, pure, and he is an heir of Heaven.

There are other aspects of Christian truth which Luther failed to apprehend. The Gospel is, of course, not only a way of reconciliation and forgiveness. He pushed his teaching of the uselessness of good works as a means of salvation too far. He said rash and exaggerated things in his vehement way about the "justifying power" of faith alone. Doubtless his language was often exaggerated, and his thoughts one-sided, in regard to subjects that need very delicate handling and careful definition. But after all that is admitted, it remains true that his strong arm tossed aside the barriers and rubbish that had been piled across the way by which prodigals could go home to their Father, and made plain once more the endless mercy of God, and the power of humble faith. He was right when he declared that whatever heights and depths there may be in God's great revelation, and however needful it is for a complete apprehension of the truth as it is in Jesus that these should find their place in the creed of Christendom, still the firmness with which that initial truth of man's sinfulness and his forgiveness and acceptance through simple faith in Christ is held, and the clear earnestness with which it is proclaimed, are the test of a standing or a falling Church.

And then, closely connected with this central principle, and yet susceptible of being stated separately, are the other two; of neither of which do I think it necessary to say more than a word. Side by side with that great discovery—for it was a discovery—by the monk in his convent, of Justification by faith, there follows the other principle of the entire sweeping away of all priesthood, and the direct access to God of every individual Christian soul. There are no more external rites to be done by a designated and separate class. There is One sacrificing Priest, and one only, and that is Jesus Christ, Who has sacrificed Himself for us all, and there are no other priests, except in the sense in which every Christian man is a priest and minister of the most high God. And no man comes between me and my Father; and no man has a right to do anything for me which brings me any grace, except in so far as mine own heart opens for the reception, and mine own faith lays hold of the grace given.

Luther did not carry that principle so far as some of us modern Nonconformists carry it. He left illogical fragments of sacramentarian and sacerdotal theories in his creed and in his Church. But, for all that, we owe mainly to him the clear utterance of that thought, the warm breath of which has thawed the ice chains which held Europe in barren bondage. Notwithstanding the present portentous revival of sacerdotalism, and the strange turning again of portions of society to these beggarly elements of the past, I believe that the figments of a sacrificing priesthood and sacramental efficacy will never again permanently darken the sky in this land, the home of the men who speak the tongue of Milton, and owe much of their religious and political freedom to the Reformation of Luther.

And the third point, which is closely connected with these other two, is this, the declaration that every illuminated Christian soul has a right and is bound to study God's Word without the Church at its elbow to teach what to think about it. It was Luther's great achievement that, whatever else he did, he put the Bible into the hands of the common people. In that department and region, his work, perhaps, bears more distinctly the traces of limitation and imperfection than anywhere else, for he knew nothing—how could he?—of the difficult questions of this day in regard to the composition and authority of Scripture, nor had he thought out his own system or done full justice to his own principle.

He could be as inquisitorial and as dogmatic as any Dominican of them all. He believed in force; he was as ready as all his fellows were to invoke the aid of the temporal power. The idea of the Church, as helped and sustained, which means fettered, and weakened, and paralysed, by the civic government, bewitched him as it did his fellows. We needed to wait for George Fox, and Roger Williams, and more modern names still before we understood fully what was involved in the rejection of priesthood, and the claim that God's Word should speak directly to each Christian soul. But for all that, we largely owe to Luther the creed that looks in simple faith to Christ: a Church without a priest, in which every man is a priest of the Most High, the only true democracy that the world will ever see; and a Church in which the open Bible and the indwelling spirit are the guides of every humble soul within its pale. These are his claims on our gratitude.

Luther's work had its limitations and its imperfections, as I have been saying to you. It will become less and less conspicuous as the ages go on. It cannot be otherwise. That is the law of the world. As a whole green forest of the carboniferous era is represented now in the rocks by a thin seam of coal, no thicker than a sheet of paper, so the stormy lives and the large works of the men that have gone before, are compressed into a mere film and line in the great cliff that slowly rises above the sea of time and is called the history of the world.

II.—Be it so! be it so! Let us turn to the other thought of our text, the perpetual work of the abiding Lord. "He Whom God raised up saw no corruption." It is a fact that there are thousands of men and women in the world to-day that have a feeling about that eighteen-centuries-dead Galilean carpenter's son that they have about nobody else. All the great names of antiquity are but ghosts and shadows, and all the names in the Church and in the world, of men whom we have not seen, are dim and ineffectual to us. They may evoke our admiration, our reverence, and our wonder, but none of them can touch the heart. And here is this unique, anomalous fact that men and women by the thousand love Jesus Christ, the dead One, the unseen One, far away back there in the ages, and feel that there is no mist of oblivion between them and Him.

This is because He does for you and me what none of these other men can do. Luther talked about a cross, Christ *died* on it.—"Was Paul crucified for you?" There is the secret of His undying hold upon the world. The further secret lies in this, that He is not a past force but a present one. He is no exhausted power but a power mighty to day; working in us, around us, on us, and for us,—a living Christ: "This Man Whom God raised up from the dead saw no corruption." The others move away from us like figures in a fog, dim as they pass into the mists, having a blurred half spectral outline for a moment, and then gone.

That death has a present and a perpetual power. He has offered one sacrifice for sins for ever; and no time can diminish the efficacy of His cross, nor our need of it, nor the full tide of blessings which flow from it to the believing soul. Therefore do men cling to Him to-day as if it was but yesterday that He had died for them. When all other names carved on the world's records have become unreadable, like forgotten inscriptions on decaying gravestones, His shall endure for ever, deep graven on fleshly tables of the heart. His Revelation of God is the highest truth. Till the end of time men will turn to His life for their clearest knowledge and happiest certainty of their Father in heaven. There is nothing limited or local in His character or works. In His meek beauty and gentle perfectness, He stands so high above us all that, to-day, the inspiration of His example and the lessons of His conduct touch us as much as if He had lived in this generation, and will always shine before men as their best and most blessed law of conduct. Christ will not be antiquated till He is outgrown, and it will be some time before that happens.

But Christ's work is not the only abiding influence of His earthly life and death. He is not a past force, but a present one. He is putting forth fresh powers to-day, working in and for and by all who love Him. We believe in a living Christ.

Therefore the final thought in all our grateful commemoration of dead helpers and guides should be, of the undying Lord. He sent whatsoever power was in them. He is with His Church to-day, still giving to men the gifts needful for their times. Aaron may die on Hor, and Moses be laid in his unknown grave on Pisgah, but the Angel of the Covenant, who is the true leader, abides in the pillar of cloud and fire, Israel's guide in the march, and covering shelter in repose. That is our consolation in our personal losses when our dear ones are "not suffered to continue by reason of death." He who gave them all their sweetness is with us still, and has all the sweetness which He lent them for a time. So, if we have Christ with us, we cannot be desolate.

Looking on all these men, who in their turn have helped forward His cause a little way, we should let their departure teach us His presence, their limitations His all-sufficiency, their death His life.

Luther was once found, at a moment of peril and fear, when he had need to grasp unseen strength, sitting in an abstracted mood, traceing on the table with his finger the words "Vivit! vivit"!—"He lives! He lives!" It is our hope for ourselves, and for His truth, and for mankind. Men come and go; leaders, teachers, thinkers, speak and work for a season and then fall silent and impotent. He abides. They die, but He lives. They are lights kindled, and therefore sooner or later quenched, but He is the true light from which they draw all their brightness, and He shines for evermore. Other men are left behind and as the world glides forward, are wrapped in ever thickening folds of oblivion, through which they shine feebly for a little while, like lamps in a fog, and then are muffled in invisibility. We honour other names, and the coming generations will forget them, but "His name shall endure for ever, His name shall continue as long as the Sun, and men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed."

WHAT THE WORLD CALLED THE CHURCH, AND WHAT THE CHURCH CALLS ITSELF.

SERMON VI.

WHAT THE WORLD CALLED THE CHURCH, AND WHAT THE CHURCH CALLS ITSELF.

"The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." (Acts xi. 26.)

NATIONS and parties, both political and religious, very often call themselves by one name, and are known to the outside world by another. These outside names are generally given in contempt; and yet they sometimes manage to hit the very centre of the characteristics of the people on whom they are bestowed; and so by degrees get to be adopted by them, and worn as an honour.

So it has been with the name "Christian." It was given at the first, by the inhabitants of the Syrian city of Antioch, to a new sort of people that had sprung up amongst them, and whom they could not quite make out. They would not fit into any of their categories, and so they had to invent a new name for them. It is never used in the New Testament by Christians about themselves. It occurs here in this text; it occurs in Agrippa's half-contemptuous exclamation: "You seem to think it is a very small matter to make me—me, a king!—a Christian; one of those despised people!" And it occurs once more, where the Apostle Peter is specifying the charges brought against them. "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed ; but let him glorify God on this behalf." (1 Peter iv. 16.) That sounds like the beginning of the process which has gone on ever since, by which the nickname, flung by the sarcastic men of Antioch, has been turned into the designation by which, all over the world, the followers of Jesus Christ have been proud to call themselves.

Now in this verse there are the outside name by which the world calls the followers of Jesus Christ, and one of the many interior names by which the Church called itself. I have thought it might be profitable this morning for us to put all the New Testament names for Christ's followers together, and think about them.

I.—So, to begin with, we deal with this name given by the world to the Church, which the Church has adopted. Observe the circumstances under which it was given. A handful of large-hearted, brave men, anonymous fugitives belonging to the little Church in Jerusalem, had come down to Antioch ; and there, without premeditation, without authority, almost without consciousness—certainly without knowing what a big thing they were doing—they took, all at once, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, a great step by preaching the Gospel to pure heathen Greeks. And so began the process by which a small Jewish sect was transformed into a world-wide church. The success of their work in Antioch, amongst the pure heathen population, has for its crowning attestation this, that it compelled the curiosity-hunting, pleasure-loving, sarcastic Antiocheans to find out a new name for this new thing ; to write out a new label for the new bottles into which the new wine was being put. Clearly the name shews that the Church was beginning to attract the attention of outsiders.

Clearly it shews, too, that there was a novel element in the Church. The earlier disciples had been all Jews, and could be lumped together along with their countrymen, and come under the same category. But here is something that could not be called either Jew or Greek, because it embraces both. The new name is the first witness to the cosmopolitan character of the primitive Church. Then clearly, too, the name indicates that in a certain dim, confused way, even these superficial observers had got hold of the right notion of what it was that *did* bind these people together. They called them "Christians"—Christ's men, Christ's followers. But it was only a very dim refraction of the truth that had got to them; they had no notion that "Christ" was not a proper name, but the designation of an office; and they had no notion that there was anything peculiar or strange in the bond which united its adherents to Christ. Hence they called His followers "Christians" just as they would have called Herod's followers "Herodians," in the political world, or Aristotle's followers "Aristotelians" in the philosophical world. Still, in their groping way, they had put their finger on the fact that the one thing that held this heterogeneous mass together, the one bond that bound up Jew and Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond and free into one vital unity, was a personal relation to a living person. And so they said—not understanding the whole significance of it, but having got hold of the right end of the clue—they said, "They are Christians!" "Christ's people," "the followers of this Christ."

And their very blunder was a felicity. If they had called them "Jesuits" that would have meant the followers of the mere man. They did not know how much deeper they had gone when they said, not followers of Jesus, but "followers of Christ;" for it is not Jesus the Man, but Jesus Christ, the Man with His office, that makes the centre and the bond of the Christian Church.

These, then, are the facts, and the fair inferences from them. A plain lesson here lies on the surface. The Church—that is to say, the men and women that make its members—should draw to itself the notice of the outside world. I do not mean by advertising, and ostentation, and sounding trumpets, and singularities, and affectations. None of all these are needed. If you are live Christians it will be plain enough to outsiders. It is a poor comment on your consistency, if, being Christ's followers, you can go through life unrecognised even by "them that are without." What shall we say of leaven which does *not* leaven, or of light which does *not* shine, or of salt which does *not* repel corruption? It is a poor affair if, being professed followers of Jesus Christ, you do not impress the world with the thought that "here is a man who does not come under any of our categories, and who needs a new entry to describe *him.*" The world ought to have the same impression about you which Haman had about the Jews—"Their laws are diverse from all people."

Christian professors! Are the world's names for themselves enough to describe you by, or do you need another name to be coined for you in order to express the manifest characteristics that you display? The Church that does not *provoke* the attention—I use the word in its etymological, not its offensive sense—the Church that does not call upon itself the attention and interest of outsiders is not the Church as Jesus Christ meant it to be, and it is not a Church that is worth keeping alive; and the sooner it has decent burial the better for itself and the world too!

There is another thing here, viz:—This name suggests that the clear impression made by our conduct and character, as well as by our words, should be that we belong to Jesus Christ. The eye of an outside observer may be unable to penetrate the secret of the deep sweet tie uniting us to Jesus, but there should be no possibility of the most superficial and hasty glance overlooking the fact that we *are* His. He should manifestly be the centre and the guide, the impulse and the pattern, the strength and the reward of our whole lives. We are Christians. That should be plain for all folks to see, whether we speak or be silent. Brethren, is it so with you? Does your life need no commentary of your words in order that men should know what is the hidden spring that moves all its wheels; what is the inward spirit that co-ordinates all its motions into harmony and beauty? Is it true that like "the ointment of the right hand which bewrayeth itself," your allegiance to Jesus Christ, and the overmastering and supreme authority which He exercises upon you, and upon your life, "cannot be hid"? Do you think that, without your words, if you, living the way you do, were put down into the middle of Pekin, as these handful of people were put down into the middle of the heathen city of Antioch, the wits of the Chinese metropolis would have to invent a name for you, as the clever men of Antioch did for these people; and do you think that if they had to invent a name, the name that would naturally come to their lips, looking at you, would be "Christians"? "Christ's men." If you do not, there is something wrong.

The last thing that I say about this first part of my text is this. It is a very sad thing, but it is a thing that is always occurring, that the world's inadequate notions of what makes a follower of Jesus Christ, get accepted by the Church. Why was it that the name "Christian" ran all over Christendom in the course of a century and a half? I believe very largely because it was a conveniently vague name; because it did not describe the deepest and sacredest of the bonds that unite us to Jesus Christ. Many a man is quite willing to say, "I am a Christian," that would hesitate a long time before he said, "I am a believer"; "I am a disciple." The vagueness of the name, the fact that it erred by defect in not touching the central, deepest relation between man and Jesus Christ, made it very appropriate to the declining spirituality and increasing formalism of the Christian Church in the post-Apostolic age. It is a sad thing when the Church drops its standard down to the world's standard of what it ought to be, and swallows the world's name for itself, and its converts.

II.—I turn now to set side by side with this vague, general, outside name the more specific and *interior* names—if I may so call them—by which Christ's followers at first knew themselves. The world said, "You are Christ's men;" and the names that I am going to gather for you, and say a word about now, might be taken as being the Church's explanation of what the world was fumbling at when it so called them. There are four of them; of course, I can only just touch on them.

The first is in this verse—"*disciples*." The others are *believers*, *saints*, *brethren*. These four are the Church's own christening of itself; its explanation and expansion, its deepening and heightening of the vague name given by the world.

As to the first, *disciples*, any concordance will shew that the name was employed almost exclusively during the time of Christ's life upon earth. It is the only name for Christ's followers in the Gospels; it occurs also, mingled with others, in the Acts of the Apostles; and it never occurs any more.

The name "disciple," then, carries us back to the historical beginning of the whole matter, when Jesus was looked upon as a Rabbi having followers called disciples; just as were John the Baptist and his followers, Gamaliel and his school, and many a one besides. It sets forth Christ as being the Teacher, and His followers as being His adherents, His scholars, who learned at His feet.

Now that is always true. *We* are Christ's scholars quite as much as the men who heard and saw with their eyes and handled with their hands of the Word of Life. Not by words only, but by gracious deeds and fair spotless life, He taught them and us and all men to the end of time, our highest knowledge of God of Whom He is the final revelation, our best knowledge of what men should and shall be by His perfect life in which is contained all morality, our only knowledge of that future in that He has died, and is risen and lives to help and still to teach. He teaches us still by the record of His life, and by the living influence of that Spirit whom He sends forth to guide us into all truth. He is the Teacher, the only Teacher, the Teacher for all men, the Teacher of all truth, the Teacher for evermore. He speaks from Heaven. Let us give heed to His voice. But that Name is not enough to tell all which He is to us, or we to Him, and so after He had passed from earth, it unconsciously and gradually dropped out of the lips of the disciples, as they felt a deepened bond uniting them to Him who was not only the Teacher of the Truth, which was Himself, but was their sacrifice and Advocate with the Father. And for all who hold the, as I believe, essentially imperfect conception of Jesus Christ as being mainly a Teacher, either by word or by pattern; whether it be put into the old form or into the modern form of regarding Him as the Ideal and Perfect Man, it seems to me a fact well worthy of consideration that the name of Disciple and the thing expressed by it, were speedily felt by the Christian Church to be inadequate as a representation of the bond that knit them to Him. He is our Teacher, we His scholars. He is more than that, and a more sacred bond unites us to Him. As our Master we owe Him absolute submission. When He speaks, we have to accept His dictum. What He says is truth, pure and entire. His utterance is the last word upon any subject that He touches, it is the ultimate appeal, and the Judge that ends the strife. We owe Him submission, an open eye for all new truth, constant docility, as conscious of our own imperfections, and a confident expectation that He will bless us continuously with high and as yet unknown truths that come from His inexhaustible stores of wisdom and knowledge.

2. Teacher and scholars move in a region which, though it be important, is not the central one. And the word that was needed next to express what the early Church felt Christ was to them, and they to Him, lifts us into a higher atmosphere altogether,—*Believers*, they who are exercising not merely intellectual submission to the dicta of the Teacher, but who are exercising living trust in the person of the Redeemer. The belief which is faith is altogether a higher thing than its first stage, which is the belief of the understanding. There is in it the moral element of trust. We believe a truth, we trust a Person; and the trust which we are to exercise in Jesus Christ, and which knits us to Him, is the trust in Him, not in any character that we may choose to ascribe to Him, but in the character in which He is revealed in the New Testament—Redeemer, Saviour, Manifest God; and therefore, the Infinite Friend and Helper of our souls.

That trust, my brethren, is the one thing that binds men to God, and the one thing that makes us Christ's men. Apart from it, we may be very near Him, but we are not joined to Him. By it, and by it alone, the union is completed, and His power and His grace flow into our spirits. Are you, not merely a "Christian," in the world's notion, being bound in some vague way to Jesus Christ, but are you a Christian in the sense of trusting your soul's salvation to Him?

3. Then, still further, there is another name—*saints*. It has suffered perhaps more at the hands both of the world

and of the Church than any other. It has been taken by the latter and restricted to the dead, and further restricted to those who excel, according to the fantastic, ascetic standard of mediæval Christianity. It has suffered from the world in that it has been used with a certain bitter emphasis of resentment at the claim of superior purity supposed to be implied in it, and so has come to mean on the world's lips a pretender to be better than other people, whose actions contradict his claim. But the name belongs to all Christ's followers. It makes no claim to special purity, for the central idea of the word "saint" is not purity. Holiness, which is the English for the Latinised "sanctity," holiness which is attributed in the Old Testament to God first, to men only secondarily, does not primarily mean *purity*, but *separation*. God is holy, inasmuch as by that whole majestic character of His, He is lifted above all bounds of creatural limitations, as well as above man's sin. A sacrifice, the Sabbath, a city, a priest's garment, a mitre—all these things are "holy," not when they are *pure*, but when they are devoted to Him. And men are holy, not because they are clean, but because by free self-surrender they have consecrated themselves to Him.

Holiness is consecration, that is to say, holiness is giving myself up to Him to do what He will with. "I am holy" is not the declaration of the fact "I am pure," but the declaration of the fact "I am thine, O Lord." So the New Testament idea of saint has in it these elements—consecration, consecration resting on faith in Christ, and consecration leading to separation from the world and its sin. And that glad yielding of oneself to God, as wooed by His mercies, and thereby drawn away from communion with our evil surroundings and from submission to our evil selves, must be a part of the experience of every true Christian. All His people are saints, not as being pure, but as being given up to Him, in union with Whom alone will the cleansing powers flow into their lives and clothe them with "the righteousness of saints." Have you thus consecrated yourself to God?

4. The last name is *brethren*—a name which has been much maltreated both by the insincerity of the Church, and by the sarcasm of the world. "Brethren!" an unreal appellation which has meant nothing and been meant to mean nothing, so that the world has said that our "brethren" signified a good deal less than their "brothers." "'Tis true, 'tis pity, ; pity 'tis, 'tis true."

But what I want you to notice is that the main thing about that name "brethren" is not the relation of the brethren to one another, but their common relation to their Father.

When we call ourselves as Christian people, "brethren," we mean first, this: that we are the possessors of a supernatural life, which has come from one Father, and which has set us in altogether new relations to one another, and to the world round about us. Do you believe that? If you have got any of that new life which comes through faith in Jesus Christ, then you are the brethren of all those that possess the same.

As society gets more complicated, as Christian people get unlike each other in education, in social position, in occupation, in their general outlook into the world, it gets more and more difficult to feel what is nevertheless true: that any two Christian people, however unlike each other, are nearer each other in the very roots of their nature, than a Christian and a non-Christian, however like each other. It is difficult to feel that, and it is getting more and more difficult, but for all that it is a fact.

And now I wish to ask you, Christian men and women that are listening to me now, whether you feel more at home with people who love Jesus Christ—as you say *you* do—or whether you like better to be with people who do not.

There are some of you that choose your intimate associates, whom you ask to your homes and introduce to your children as desirable companions, with no reference at all to their religious character. The duties of your position, of course, oblige each of you to be much among people who do not share your faith, and it is cowardly and wrong to shrink from the necessity. But for Christian people to make choice of heart friends, or close intimates among those who have no sympathy with their professed belief about, and love to Jesus Christ, does not say much for the depth and reality of their religion. A man is known by the company he keeps, and if your friends are picked out for other reasons, and their religion is no part of their attraction, it is not an unfair conclusion that there are other things for which you care more than you do for faith in Jesus Christ and love to Him. If you deeply feel the bond that knits you to Christ, and really live near to Him, you will be near your brethren. You will feel that "blood is thicker than water," and however like you may be to irreligious people in many things, you will feel that the deepest bond of all knits you to the poorest, the most ignorant, the most unlike you in social position ;—ay ! and the most unlike you in theological opinion, that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Now that is the sum of the whole matter. And my last word to you is this : Do not you be contented with the world's vague notions of what makes Christ's man. I do not ask you if you are Christians ; plenty of you would say : "Oh, yes ! of course ! Is not this a Christian country ? Was not I christened when I was a child ? Are we not all members of the Church of England by virtue of our birth ? Yes ! of course I am !"

I do not ask you that ; *I* do not ask you anything ; but

I pray you to ask yourselves these four questions—"Am I Christ's scholar?" "Am I believing on Him?" "Am I consecrated to Him?" Am I the possessor of a new life?" And never give yourselves rest until you can say, humbly and yet confidently, "Yes! Thank God, I am!"

FAITH CONQUERING THE WORLD.

SERMON VII.

FAITH CONQUERING THE WORLD.

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 John v. 4.

NO New Testament writer makes such frequent use of the metaphors of combat and victory as this gentle Apostle John. None of them seem to have conceived so habitually of the Christian life as being a conflict, and in none of their writings does the clear note of victory in the use of that word "overcometh" ring out so constantly as it does in those of the very Apostle of Love. Equally characteristic of John's writings is the prominence which he gives to the still contemplation of, and abiding in, Christ. These two conceptions of the Christian life appear to be discordant, but are really harmonious.

There is no doubt where John learned the phrase. Once he had heard it at a time and in a place which stamped it on his memory for ever. "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," said Christ, an hour before Gethsemane. Long years since then had taught John something of its meaning, and had made him to understand how the Master's victory might belong to the servants. Hence in this letter he has much to say about "overcoming the wicked one," and the like; and in the Apocalypse we never get far away from hearing the shout of victory, whether we consider the sevenfold promises of the letters that stand at the beginning of the visions, or whether we listen to such sayings as this:—"They overcame by the blood of the Lamb," or the last promise of all:—"He that overcometh shall inherit all things."

Thus bound together by that link, as well as by a great many more, are all the writings which the tradition of the Church has attributed to this great Apostle.

But to come to the words of my text. They appear in a very remarkable context here. If you read a verse or two before, you will get the full singularity of their introduction. "This is the love of God," says he, "that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous." They *are* very heavy and hard in themselves; it is very difficult to do right, and to walk in the ways of God, and to please Him. His commandments *are* grievous, *per se;* a heavy burden, a difficult thing to do—but let us read on:—"They are not grievous, *for* whatsoever is born of God"—keepeth the commandments? No! "Whatsoever is born of God *overcometh the world.*" That, thinks John, is the same thing as keeping God's commandments. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Notice, then, first, What is the true notion of conquering the world? secondly, How that victory may be ours?

I.—What is the true notion of conquering the world? Let us go back to what I have already said. Where did John learn the expression? Who was it that first used it? It comes from that never-to-be-forgotten night in that upper room; where, with His life's purpose apparently crushed into nothing, and the world just ready to exercise its last power over Him by killing Him, Jesus Christ breaks out into such a strange strain of triumph, and in the midst of apparent defeat lifts up that clarion note of victory :—" I have overcome the world ! "

He had not made much of it, according to usual standards, had He ? His life had been the life of a poor man. Neither fame nor influence, nor what people call success, had He won, judged from the ordinary points of view, and at three-and-thirty is about to be murdered ; and yet He says, " I have beaten it all, and here I stand a conqueror ! " That threw a flood of light for John, and for all that had listened to Christ, on the whole conditions of human life, and on what victory and defeat, success and failure in this world mean. Not so do men usually estimate what conquering the world is. Not so do you and I estimate it when we are left to our own folly and our own weakness. Our notion of being victorious in life is when each man, according to his own ideal of what is best, manages to wring that ideal out of a reluctant world. Or, to put it into plainer words, a man desires, say, conspicuous notoriety and fame. He accounts that he has conquered when he scrambles over all his fellows, and writes his name, as boys do, upon a wall, higher than anybody else's name, with a bit of chalk, in writing that the next winter's storm will obliterate ! That is victory ! The Manchester ideal says, " Found a big business and make it pay." That is to conquer ! Other notions, higher and nobler than that, all partake of the same fallacy that if a man can get the world, the sum of external things, into his grip, and squeeze it as one does a grape, and get the last drop of sweetness out of it into his thirsty lips, he is a conqueror.

Well ! and you may get all that, whatever it is, that seems to you best, sweetest, most needful, most toothsome and delightsome—you may get it all ; and in a sense you may have conquered the world, and yet you may be utterly beaten and enslaved by it. Do you remember the old story—I make no apology for the plainness of it—of the man that said to his commanding officer, "I have taken a prisoner." "Bring him along with you." "He won't let me." "Come yourself, then." "I can't." So you think you have conquered the world when it yields you the things you want, and all the while it has conquered and captivated *you*.

You say "Mine!" It would be a great deal nearer the truth if the possessions, or the love, or the wealth, or the culture, or whatever else it may be, that you have set your desire upon, were to rise up and say you are theirs! Utterly beaten and enslaved many a man is by the things that he vainly fancies *he* has mastered and conquered. If you think of how in the process of getting, you narrow yourselves; of how much you throw away; of how eyes become blind to beauty or goodness or graciousness; of how you become the slaves of the thing that you have won; of how the gold gets into a man's blood and makes his complexion as yellow as jaundice,—if you think of all that, and how desperate and wretched you would be if in a minute it was all swept away, and how it absorbs your thoughts in keeping it and looking after it, say, is it you that are its master, or it that is yours?

Now let us turn for a moment to the teaching of this Epistle. Following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ Himself, the poor man, the beaten man, the unsuccessful man, may yet say, "I have overcome the world." What does that mean? Well, it is built upon this,—the world, meaning thereby the sum total of outward things, considered as apart from God—the world and God we make to be antagonists to one another. And the world woos me to trust to it, to love it; crowds in upon my eye and shuts out the greater things beyond; absorbs my attention, so that if I let it have its own way I have no leisure to think about anything but itself. And the world conquers me when it succeeds in hindering me from seeing, loving, holding communion with and serving my Father, God.

On the other hand, I conquer it when I lay my hand upon it and force it to help me to get nearer Him, to get liker Him, to think more often of Him, to do His will more gladly and more constantly. The one victory over the world is to bend it to serve me in the highest things—the attainment of a clearer vision of the Divine nature, the attainment of a deeper love to God Himself, and of a more glad consecration and service to Him. That is the victory,—when you can make the world a ladder to lift you to God. That is its right use, that is victory, when all its tempting voices do not draw you away from listening to the Supreme Voice that bids you keep His commandments. When the world comes between you and God as an obscuring screen, it has conquered you. When the world comes between you and God as a transparent medium, you have conquered it. To win victory is to get it beneath your feet and stand upon it, and reach up thereby to God.

Now, dear brethren, that is the plain teaching of all this context, and I would lay it upon your hearts and upon my own. Do not let us be deceived by the false estimates of the men around us. Do not let us forget that the one thing we have to live for is to know God, and to love and to please Him, and that every life is a disastrous failure, whatsoever outward artificial apparent success it may be enriched and beautified with, that has not accomplished that.

You rule Nature, you coerce winds and lightnings and flames to your purposes. Rule the world! Rule the world by making it help you to be wiser, gentler, nobler, more gracious, more Christ-like, more Christ-conscious, more full of God, and more like to Him, and then you will get the deepest delight out of it. If a man wanted to find a wine-press that should squeeze out of the vintage of this world its last drop of sweetest sweetness, he would find it in constant recognition of the love of God, and in the coercing of all the outward and the visible to be his help thereto.

There are the two theories; the one that we are all apt to fall into, of what success and victory is; the other the Christian theory. Ah! many a poor, battered Lazarus, full of sores, a pauper and a mendicant at Dives' gate; many a poor old cottager; many a lonely woman in her garret; many a man that has gone away from Manchester, for instance, unable to get on in business, and obliged to creep into some corner and hide himself, not having succeeded in making a fortune, is the victor! And many a Dives, fettered by his own possessions, and the bond-slave of his own successes, is beaten by the world shamefully and disastrously! Pray and strive for the purged eyesight which shall teach you what it is to conquer the world, and what it is to be conquered by it.

II.—And now let me turn for a moment to the second of the points that I have desired to put before you, viz., the method by which this victory over the world, of making it help us to keep the commandments of God, is to be accomplished. We find, according to John's fashion, a three-fold statement in this context upon this matter, each member of which corresponds to and heightens the preceding. We read thus:—"Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." "This is the victory that overcometh the world," or more accurately, "*hath overcome* the world, even our faith." Who is He that overcometh the world? He that believeth that Jesus Christ is "the Son of God." Wherein there are, speaking roughly, these three statements, that the true victory over the world is won by a new life, born of and kindred with God; that that life is kindled in men's souls through their faith;

that the faith which kindles that supernatural life, the victorious antagonist of the world, is the definite, specific faith in Jesus as the Son of God. These are the three points which the Apostle puts as the means of conquest of the world.

The first consideration, then, suggested by these statements is that the one victorious antagonist of all the powers of the world which seek to draw us away from God, is a life in our hearts kindred with God, and derived from God.

Now I know that a great many people turn away from this central representation of Christianity as if it were mystical and intangible. I desire to lay it upon your hearts, dear brethren, that every Christian man has received and possesses through the open door of his faith, a life supernatural, born of God, kindred with God, therefore having nothing kindred with evil, and therefore capable of meeting and mastering all the temptations of the world.

It is a plain piece of common-sense, that God is stronger than this material universe, and that what is born of God partakes of the Divine strength. But there would be no comfort in that, nor would it be anything germane and relevant to the Apostle's purpose, unless there was implied in the statement what in fact is distinctly asserted more than once in this Epistle, that every Christian man and woman may claim to be thus born of God. Hearken to the words that almost immediately precede our text, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." Hearken to other words which proclaim the same truth. "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, which were born, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." He does come with all the might of His regenerating power into our poor natures, if and when we turn ourselves with humble faith to that dear Lord; and breathes into our deadness a new life, with new tastes, new desires, new motives, new powers, making us able to wrestle with and to overcome the temptations that were too strong for us.

Mystical and deep as this thought may be, God's nature is breathed into the spirits of men that will trust Him! and if you will put your confidence in that dear Lord, and live near Him, into your weakness will come an energy born of the Divine, and you will be able to do all things in the might of the Christ that strengthens you from within, and is the life of your life, and the soul of your soul. To the little beleaguered garrison surrounded by strong enemies through whom they cannot cut their way, the king sends reliefs who force their passage into the fortress, and hold it against all the power of the foe. You are not left to fight by yourselves, you can conquer the world if you will trust to that Christ, trusting in Whom God's own power will come to your aid, and God's own Spirit will be the strength of your spirit.

And then there is the other way of looking at this same thing, viz., you can conquer the world if you will trust in Jesus Christ, because such trust will bring you into constant, living, loving contact with the Great Conqueror. There is a beautiful accuracy and refinement in the language of these three clauses which is not represented in our Authorised Version. The central one which I have read as my text this morning might be translated as it is translated in the Revised Version—"This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith." By which I suppose the Apostle means very much what I am saying now, viz., that my faith brings me into contact with that one great victory over the world which for all time was won by Jesus Christ. I can appropriate Christ's conquest to myself if I trust Him. The might of it and some portion of the reality of it passes into my nature in the measure in which I rely upon Him. He conquered once for all, and the very remembrance of His conquest, by faith will make me strong—will "teach my hands to war and my fingers to fight." He conquered once for all, and His victory will pass, with electric power, into my life if I trust Him. I am brought into living fellowship with Him. All the stimulation of example, and all that lives lofty and pure can do for us, is done for us in transcendant fashion by the life of Jesus Christ. And all that lives lofty and pure can never do for us is done in unique fashion by the life and death of Him Whose life and death are alike the victory over the world and the pattern for us.

So if we join ourselves to Him by faith, and bring into our daily life, in all its ignoble effort, in all its little duties, in all its wearisome monotonies, in all its triviality, the thought, the illuminating thought, the ennobling thought, of the victorious Christ our companion and our Friend—*in hoc signo vinces*—in this sign thou shalt conquer! They that keep hold of His hand see over the world and all its falsenesses and fleetingnesses. They that trust in Jesus are more than conquerors by the might of His victory.

And then there is the last thought, which, though it be not directly expressed in the words before us, is yet closely connected with them. You can conquer the world if you will trust Jesus Christ, because your faith will bring into the midst of your lives the grandest and most solemn and blessed realities. Faith is the true anasthesia of the soul; —the thing that deadens it to the pains and the pleasures that come from this fleeting life. As for the pleasures, I remember reading lately of some thinker of our own land who was gazing through a telescope at the stars, and turned away from the solemn vision with one remark,- -" I don't think much of our county families!" And if you will look up at Christ through the telescope of your faith, it is wonderful what Lilliputians the Brobdignagians round about you will dwindle into, and how small the world will look, and how coarse the pleasures.

If a man goes to Italy, and lives in the presence of the pictures there, it is marvellous what daubs the works of art, that he used to admire, look when he comes back to England again. And if he has been in communion with Jesus Christ, and has found out what real sweetness is, he will not be over-tempted by the coarse dainties that people eat here. Children spoil their appetites for wholesome food by sweetmeats; we very often do the same in regard to the bread of God, but if we have once really tasted it, we shall not care very much for the vulgar dainties on the world's stall.

Dear brethren, set your faith upon that great Lord, and the world's pleasures will have less power over you, and as for its pains—

"There's nothing either good or bad,
But thinking makes it so."

If a man does not think that the world's pains are of much account, they are not of much account. He who sees athwart the smoke of the fire of Smithfield, the face of the Captain of his warfare, Who has conquered, will dare to burn and will not dare to deny his Master or his Master's truth. The world may threaten in hope of winning you to its service, but if its threats, turned into realities, fail to move you, it is the world which inflicts, and not you who suffer, that is beaten. In the extremest case they "kill the body and after that have no more that they can do," and if they have done all they can, and have not succeeded in wringing the recantation from the locked lips, they are beaten, and the poor dead martyr that they could only kill has conquered them and their torments. So fear not all that the world can do against you. If you have got a little spark of the light of Christ's presence in your heart, the darkness will not be very terrible, and you will not be alone.

So, brethren, two questions :—Does your faith do anything like that for you ? If it does not, what do you think is the worth of it ? Does it deaden the world's delights ? Does it lift you above them ? Does it make you conqueror ? If it does not, do you think it is worth calling faith ?

And the other question is : Do you want to beat, or to be beaten ? When you consult your true self, does your conscience not tell you that it were better for you to keep God's commandments than to obey the world ? Surely there are many young men and women in this place to day who have some desires high, and true, and pure, though often stained, and overcome, and crushed down ; and many older folk who have glimpses, in the midst of predominant regard for the things that are seen and temporal, of a great calm, pure region away up there that they know very little about.

Dear friends, my one word to you all is : Get near Jesus Christ by thought, and love, and trust. Trust to Him and to the great love that gave itself for you. And then bring Him into your life, by daily reference to Him of it all : and by cultivating the habit of thinking about Him as being present with you in the midst of it all, and so holding His hand, you will share in His victory ; and at the last, according to the climax of His sevenfold promises, "To Him that overcometh will I give to sit down with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with My Father on His Throne."

"IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME."

SERMON VIII.

"IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME."

"This do in remembrance of Me." 1 Cor xi 24.

THIS Epistle to the Corinthians is prior in date to any of the Gospels, consequently we have, in the section from which my text is taken, the earliest account of the institution of the Lord's Supper. More than that, the account is entirely independent of the oral tradition which may be supposed to have preceded the written Gospels amongst the Christian communities. For the Apostle distinctly affirms, in the immediate context, that he received this narrative of the institution of the Lord's Supper from none of the guests in that upper chamber, but from the host Himself.

By what means the communication was made it boots not to inquire; vision, or ecstacy, or special revelation, we know not how. But if language have any meaning, we have here an account which the repeater of it to the Corinthian Church declares he got straight from the lips of the risen Lord Himself.

Consequently the words before us, and the whole section, of which they are a part, afford us a means of tracing up the celebration of the Lord's Supper to a period very near in time to the death of Christ, and thus yield to us a very strong presumption, in addition to that of the Gospel narrative, of the historical accuracy of the story, and a valuable indication of the aspect in which it was regarded by the primitive belief of Christendom.

The occasion for the utterance of the words of my text is also very characteristic of the Apostle Paul, and instructive to us: If it had not been for some abuses in the Corinthian Church, we should never have had here from his lips one word about this ordinance; and in that event there would have been scarcely any reference in the whole New Testament, to the Lord's supper beyond the short narratives in three out of the four Gospels.

These entirely incidental, fragmentary, sparse references in the New Testament to all matters of Church organisation, polity, and ritual, ought to be very instructive to us as to where the true centre of gravity lies, and ought to rebuke the attempts that are made to lift any of these outward things, the form of the sheepfold or any of the modes of worship, into a position of more than secondary importance. I heard someone say, a day or two ago, that the Emperor of Russia, with Nihilists round about him ready to blow him up, spends most of his time in designing buttons for the uniforms of his soldiers; and I think Christian men who waste time and strength over such questions at this day are not much wiser than that. However, that is not what I wanted to talk about this morning. I desire to take these words as the foundation of a few remarks in reference to the purpose and meaning of the great rite of Christendom—the Lord's Supper.

I.—And first, let us regard it as a memorial.

Now, observe that the words which I have read are even stronger in the original than they are in our translation. "This do in remembrance of Me" might mean

"This do because you remember." But the real rendering is :—"This do for a remembrance of Me"; "in order that you may remember," or "lest you forget." And the words are all but a verbatim quotation of those used in the institution of that Passover which our Lord, with sovereign authority, brushed aside in order to make room for His own memorial rite. "This day shall be unto you for a memorial," says the law of the Passover. The Lord's Supper was grafted upon and meant to supersede the older feast. And the words forming our text must obviously be supposed to have distinct reference to those of Exodus, and to be meant to substitute for the memories so stirring to Jewish national pride and devout feeling, the remembrance of Him as the one thing needful.

Notice also that this is Christ's own distinct statement of the purpose of the Lord's Supper, "for a 'remembrance,' in order to bring Me again to your recollection." I suppose He is likely to have put foremost the main purpose of the ceremonial, and I suppose that if there be any *alleged* purposes of it, of which there is no hint to be gathered from His own distinct statement of what the meaning of the rite is, that is a strong argument against these. So I want you to mark that Christ Himself has told us that this rite is meant to bring Him to our remembrance, and that He has given us no other statement of its purpose but that. Nor will you find anywhere in the New Testament any statement of the purpose of the Lord's Supper additional to this. And so I say that all our theories about the meaning and value and virtue of this Communion Service must be found within the four corners of that word :—"This do for a remembrance of Me!"—a memorial rite, and as far as I know, nothing more whatsoever. Nothing more, certainly, in so far as Christ's own solemn declaration of its purpose, and of His intention in establishing it, can be supposed to go.

Notice further about this first part of my subject :—of what the Lord's Supper is a memorial, viz., "A memorial of Me." Of Me! I do not need to dwell upon what I have hinted already—the remarkable way in which Christ deals, as One that has authority, with the sacredest rite of the nation to which He and His Apostles belonged; brushing aside the thing that for centuries had been the very Palladium of their national life, and the vital centre of their national worship; and saying in effect :—"Moses and that old redemption that you have heard about all these centuries, are antiquated; and a mere flickering taper light as compared with the redemption that I bring. You have remembered him and his deliverance; forget him! Lo, the shadow passes, and here I stand, the substance! Do this; never mind about your old Passover; —that is done with, wheeled away into a corner and forgotten. Do this in remembrance—no longer of dead Pharaohs and exhausted deliverances, but do this in remembrance of an everloving friend and helper; and of a redemption that shall never pass away. 'In remembrance of Me!'"

What a marvellous, unique, majestic prevision that was, that from that little room, in some upper chamber in that obscure corner of the world, looked all down the ages and expected that to the end of time men would turn to Him with passionate thankfulness, and with a flame of love ever leaping in their hearts! And more wonderful still, the forecast has been true, and the memory of millions turns to one thing in the past as the centre of life, the Cross of Christ, and to one thing in the future as the fountain of Hope—the Throne of the crucified Christ. "Do this in remembrance of Me."

And as majestic as is the authority so tender and gracious is the condescension :—"Do *this* for a remembrance." He does not rely upon His mighty love and sacrifice for the remembrance, the grateful remembrance of the world, but He consents and condescends to trust some portion of our remembrance of Him to mere outward things. The world, time, sense, the material and the visible come rushing in upon us and make us forget. Like a snowstorm in an American winter, our atmosphere is all filled with the flying motes, almost impalpable, of the thick driving trifles that hide the sky from us. The fluttering flakes of ever-recurring cares and duties, joys and sorrows, obscure the blue and the Christ that is there.

And so He takes and uses for once the things of time and sense to fight the things of time and sense with, and says :—"The visible shall serve Me in this one instance ; and the material elements shall conspire to help you to remember My great love."

Surely we need all the help we can get to keep His memory vivid and fresh in spite of the pressure of the visible and temporal. If it be possible to bring Him and His great world of love before our minds through the help of sight as well as by the hearing of the ear, we shall be armed with double armour.

The purpose of Christ in instituting this rite is simply that men should have presented to them in visible form, as well as in audible form by the spoken voice, the facts on which their salvation depends. Although the differences are infinite in regard of the sacredness of the person and the thing to be remembered, shall I shock any of you if I say that I know no difference in kind between the bread and the wine that is for a memorial of Christ's dying love, and the handkerchief dipped in blood, sent from the scaffold by a dying King with the one message :—"Remember!" "Do this for a memorial of me!"

II.—I come to the next point that I wish to touch on, viz. the Lord's Supper as being what is called a means of grace ; or, less technically, a source of religious profit and growth. Now, if what I have been saying about the one purpose of this Communion rite be true, there follows from it, as a matter of course, this—that the only way by which this or any other outward ceremony can do a man any good is by its fulfilling the purpose for which it was appointed, and setting him to think of and feel the truth that is in Jesus Christ. I know only one way by which what theologians call grace can get into men's souls, and that is through the occupation of a man's understanding, heart, and will, with Jesus Christ and the Gospel that tells of Him. To think of Him, to contemplate Him, to love Him, and to yield the submission of the will and the life to Him :—that is, at bottom, the one channel through which all God's grace comes to a man's heart ; and the good that any outward thing does us, the good that any act of worship does us, that any rite or ceremony whatsoever does us, is only this : that it brings before us the truth on which our hopes depend, and knits to our contemplation and our heart the Christ and His love ; and the measure in which it does that is the exact measure of the blessing that it works upon us.

I can find nothing more than this in this Communion, except only that it is obedience to a definite command of Jesus Christ, and so has the blessing which always follows upon obedience to Him. These two, the blessing that comes from obedience to His commandment and the blessing that comes from having our thoughts turned to Him, and faith and hope excited and kindled towards Him—these exhaust, as far as I know, the whole of the good that that Communion Service does to any man.

And I think all that is confirmed very strongly by the remarks in the context about the mischief that it sometimes does to people. We read there words which superstition has laid hold of in order to darken the whole horizon, and turn the whole purpose of the Lord's Supper to another thing altogether from what it was in its original institution. We read in the context about an unworthy partaking, and that unworthy partaking is defined. —Whoso eateth and drinketh" (*not* "unworthily," for that word in that verse is an unauthorised supplement), "eateth and drinketh judgment to Himself, not discerning the Lord's Body."

That is to say, unworthy participation is a participation which does not use the external symbols as a means of turning thought and feeling to Christ and His death; and unworthy participation does a man harm, as unworthy handling of any outward rite does.

I preach a sermon. I try with words here to lead men to look to Jesus Christ. If my poor attempt fail and my words come between you and Him rather as an obscuring medium than as a transparent medium, then my sermon does you harm. You read a hymn. The hymn is meant to lead you up to Christ your Saviour in aspiration and devotion. If it does not do that, then it does you harm.

If through the outward ritual we see Christ, we get all the good that the outward ritual can do us. If through the outward rite we do not see Him, if the coloured glass stay the eye instead of leading it on, then the rite does us harm. To my judgment the difference between the Lord's Supper, and its operation upon the Christian life, and a sermon or a prayer or the reading of a chapter or any other piece of Christian worship and service and their operation lie here; that, first, one is more definitely a commandment than the other; second, that the one presents the truth more directly to the understanding through the ear, and that the other presents it in symbolical and pictorial form through the eye, and third, that in the participation of the Lord's Supper there is an increased sacredness by reason of the sacredness of the thing of which it is a memorial, and by reason that it is a more personal profession of faith therein. These points, I think, exhaust all that the New Testament tells in reference to its sanctity.

And sure I am that neither it nor anything else can do a man spiritual good, except by one way, and on one condition. All outward rites and forms are "schoolmasters to bring us to Christ." If they do that they help us, if they do not, they hurt us. The one condition of spiritual blessing is union with Him, the one means of union with Him is the exercise of faith and love towards Him. If the rite strengthen this, it has blessed you; if it does not, it is a curse to you.

How the whole fabric of superstitious sacerdotalism and externalism that has cursed God's Church for centuries disappears when once men find out that there is nothing to help them but only their grasp of Jesus Christ, and that the only way of grasping Him is by faith and love, and that the only good of anything ritual is as subserving that, and perchance stimulating and increasing these!

III.—And so, lastly, and briefly, there is another aspect of this rite, which is set forth in these words, namely, the Lord's Supper as a witness for Christian truth.

"This do for a remembrance of Me!" I do not dwell further upon what I have already said about the significance of that extraordinary self-consciousness which here claims to the end of time the reverence, the regard, the remembrance of humanity. Nor do I merely mean that the Lord's Supper, by reason of its very early origin and the history of Christianity, is a witness as to the belief predominant at the point of origin. But what I mean is this:—Christ Himself, if we accept the story of the Gospels and of this chapter, has appointed this institution and selected for us, by the pointing of His finger, the part of His mission which He considers the vital and all-important centre :—"Do this in remembrance of Me!" "This is My body, broken for you. This is the new covenant in My blood, shed for many, "according to the other version in one of the Gospels," for the remission of sins."

There is the heart of Christ's work, my brother. That death is the kernel of objective Christianity. Not His words, not His loving deeds of mercy, not His tenderness, to nothing of all these does He point us. They are all included and subordinated, but He points us to His violent death; for from the fact that "body" and "blood" are contemplated apart, it is clear that not merely death, but a violent death was in His mind. He points us to His violent death, as if He said, "There is the thing that is to touch hearts and change lives, and bind men to Me with endless bonds of deep and life-transforming gratitude."

Christ Himself has taught us that what He will have to be remembered through all generations is the fact that He died, the fact that He died for us, the fact that in His blood is the covenant of our pardon, and of our peace with God. Forms of Christianity which have let go the Incarnation and the Atonement do not know what to make of the Lord's Supper. There is no room for it amongst them, and practically you will find that such forms of Christianity have relegated it to a corner, and have almost disused it. They who do not feel that Christ's death is their peace, do not feel that the rite that commemorates the broken Body and the shed Blood is the centre of Christian worship.

I dare say I am speaking to people this morning who regard it as a very unnecessary part of Christian service. My brother, Jesus Christ knew what He meant by His work quite as well as you do, and he thought that the part of it which most concerns us to remember was this: "that He died for our sins, according to the Scriptures." I commend that thought to you, and point to that table as a witness to every man and woman who believes that this Communion was established by Jesus Christ Himself, that the centre of Christian truth and of the Gospel of Christ is the good news of His death on the Cross for the sins of the whole world.

And now I ask you, dear brethren, to remember this, that as plain and distinct as the teaching is of this ordinance in reference to what is the living heart of Christ's work for us, so plain and distinct is its teaching in reference to what is our way of making that work ours.

We eat that we may live, we take the bread that perisheth into our lips, masticate and swallow and the food is assimilated to our body, and so we are nourished.

We take Christ. "Believe and thou hast eaten," says Augustine. We take Christ, the fact of His death, of His love, of His personal life for us to-day, and by faith we partake of Him, and the body is assimilated to the food, and so in that higher region we live. If we are to have life in us, it must be by no outward connection through ritual and ceremony, but by an inward possession of that which ritual and ceremony proclaim, namely, the life of Him that lived that we may be partakers of His Resurrection, the death of Him that died that in Him we too might die to self and sin.

This table preaches to us all, "My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed." And it preaches no less emphatically the other great word, "Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

HOW TO SWEETEN THE LIFE OF GREAT CITIES.

SERMON IX.

HOW TO SWEETEN THE LIFE OF GREAT CITIES.

"The priests repaired every one over against his house." Nehemiah iii. 28.

THE condition of our great cities has lately been forced upon public attention, and all kinds of men have been offering their panaceas. I am not about to enter upon that discussion, but as we are making a collection this morning for our Manchester City Mission I am glad to seize the opportunity of saying one or two things which I think very much need to be said to individual Christian people about their duty in the matter. "Every man over against his house," is the principle I want to commend to you this morning as going a long way to solve the problem of how to sweeten the foul life of our modern cities.

The story from which my text is taken does not need to detain us long. Nehemiah and his little band of exiles have come back to a ruined Jerusalem. Their first care is to provide for their safety, and the first step is to know the exact extent of their defencelessness. So we have the account of Nehemiah's midnight ride amongst the ruins of the broken walls. And then we read of the co-operation of all classes in the work of reconstruction. "Many hands made light work." Men and women, priests and nobles, goldsmiths, apothecaries, merchants, all seized trowel or spade, and wheeled and piled. One man puts up a long length of wall, another can only venture a little bit; another undertakes the locks, bolts, and bars for the gates. Roughly and hastily the work is done. The result, of course, is very unlike the stately structures of Solomon's or of Herod's time, but it is enough for shelter. We can imagine the sigh of relief with which they looked upon the completed circle of their rude fortifications.

The principle of division of labour in our text is repeated several times in this list of the builders. It was a natural one; a man would work all the better when he saw his own roof mutely appealing to be defended, and thought of the dear ones that were there. But I take these words mainly as suggesting some thoughts applicable to the duties of Christian people in view of the spiritual wants of our great cities.

I.—I need not do more than say a word or two about the *ruins which need repair.* If I dwell rather upon the dark side than on the bright side of city life I shall not be understood as forgetting that the very causes which intensify the evil of a great city quicken the good—the friction of multitudes and the impetus thereby given to all kinds of mental activity. Here amongst us there is much that is admirable and noble—much public spirit, much wise and benevolent expenditure of thought and toil for the general good, much conjoint action by men of different parties, earnest antagonism and earnest co-operation, and a free, bracing intellectual atmosphere, which stimulates activity. All that is true, though, on the other hand, it is not good to live always within hearing of the clatter of machinery and the strife of tongues; and the wisdom that is born of solitary meditation and quiet thought is less frequently met with in cities than the cleverness that is born of intercourse with men, and newspaper reading.

But there is a tragic other side to all that, which mostly we make up our minds to say little about and to forget. I confess that I have been rather surprised that the "Bitter Cry of Outcast London," and of "Squalid Liverpool" should have been so much of a discovery. The indifference which has made that ignorance possible, and has in its turn been fed by the ignorance, is in some respects a more shocking phenomenon than the vicious life which it has allowed to rot and to reek unheeded.

Most of us have got so familiarised with the evils that stare us in the face every time we go out upon the pavements, that we have come to think of them as being inseparable from our modern life, like the noise of a carriage wheel from its rotation. And is it so then? Is it indeed inevitable that within a stone's throw of our churches and chapels there should be thousands of men and women that have never been inside a place of worship since they were christened; and have no more religion than a horse? Must it be that the shining structure of our modern society, like an old Mexican temple, must be built upon a layer of living men, flung in for a foundation! Can it not be helped that there should be streets in Manchester into which it is unfit for a decent woman to go by day alone, and unsafe for a brave man to venture after nightfall? Must men and women huddle together in dens where decency is as impossible as it is for swine in a stye? Is it an indispensable part of our material progress and wonderful civilisation that vice and crime and utter irreligion and hopeless squalor should go with it? Can all that bilge water really not be pumped out of the ship? If it be so, then I venture to say that, to a very large extent, progress is a delusion, and that the simple life of agricultural communities is better than this unwholesome aggregation of men.

The beginning of Nehemiah's work of repair was that sad midnight ride round the ruined walls. So there is a solemn obligation laid on Christian people to acquaint themselves with the awful facts, and then to meditate on them, till sacred, Christ-like compassion, pressing against the flood-gates of the heart, flings them open, and lets out a stream of helpful pity and saving deeds.

"If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, those that ready to be slain; if thou sayest: Behold! we knew it not! doth not He that pondereth the heart consider it; and shall He not render to every man according to his works?"

II.—So much for my first point. My second is—the ruin is to be repaired mainly by the old Gospel of Jesus Christ. Far be it from me to pit remedies against each other. The causes are complicated, and the cure must be as manifold as the causes. For my own part I believe that, in regard of the condition of the lowest of our outcast population, drink and lust have done it almost all, and that for all but an infinitesimal portion of it, intemperance is directly or indirectly the cause. That has to be fought by the distinct preaching of abstinence, and by the invoking of legislative restrictions upon the traffic. Wretched homes have to be dealt with by sanitary reform, which may require municipal and parliamentary action. Domestic discomfort has to be dealt with by teaching wives the principles of domestic economy. The gracious influence of art and music, pictures and window gardening, and the like, will lend their aid to soften and refine. Coffee taverns, baths and wash-houses, workmen's clubs, and many other agencies are doing real and good work. I, for one, say, God speed to them all, and willingly help them so far as I can.

But, as a Christian man, I believe that I know a thing that if lodged in a man's heart, will do pretty nearly all which they aspire to do ; and whilst I rejoice in the multiplied agencies for social elevation, I believe that I shall best serve my generation, and I believe that ninety-nine out of a hundred of you will do so too by trying to get men to love and fear Jesus Christ the Saviour. If you can get His love into a man's heart, that will produce new tastes and new inclinations, which will reform, and sweeten, and purify faster than anything else does.

They tell us that Nonconformist ministers are never seen in the slums ; well, that is a libel ! But I should like to ask why it is the Roman Catholic priest is seen there more than the Nonconformist minister. Because the one man's congregation is there, and the other man's is not—which being translated into other words is this : the religion of Jesus Christ mostly keeps people out of the slums, and certainly it will take a man out of them if once it gets into his heart, more certainly and quickly than anything else will.

So, dear friends, if we have in our hearts and in our hands this great message of God's love, we have in our possession the germ out of which all things that are lovely and of good report will grow. It will purify, elevate, and sweeten society, because it will make individuals pure and strong, and homes holy and happy. We do not need to draw comparisons between this and other means of reparation, and still less to feel any antagonism to them or the benevolent men who work them ; but we should fix it in our minds that the principles of Christ's Gospel adhered to by individuals and therefore by communities, would have rendered such a condition of things impossible, and that the true repair of the ruin wrought by evil and ignorance, in the single soul, in the family, the city, the nation, the world, is to be found in building anew on the One Foundation which God has laid, even Jesus Christ, the Living Stone, Whose pure life passes into all that are grounded and founded on Him.

III.—Lastly, this remedy is to be applied by the individual action of Christian men and women on the people nearest them.

"The priests repaired every one over against his own house." We are always tempted in the face of large disasters, to look for heroic and large remedies, and to invoke corporate action of some sort, which is a great deal easier for most of us than the personal effort that is required. When a great scandal and danger like this of the condition of the lower layers of our civic population is presented before men, for one man that says "What can *I* do?" there are twenty who say, "Somebody should do something. Goverment should do something. The Corporation should do something. This, that, or the other aggregate of men should do something." And the individual calmly and comfortably slips his neck out of the collar and leaves it on the shoulders of these abstractions.

As I have said, there are plenty of things that need to be done by these somebodies. But what they do (they will be a long time in doing it) when they do get to work will only touch the fringe of the question, and the substance and the centre of it *you* can set to work upon this afternoon if you like, and not wait for anybody either to set you the example or to shew you the way.

If you want to do people good you can; but you have got to pay the price for it. That price is personal sacrifice and effort. The example of Jesus Christ is the all-instructive one in the case. People talk about Him being their pattern, but they often forget that whatever more there was in Christ's Cross and Passion there was this in it:—the exemplification for all time of the one law by which any reformation can be wrought on men—that a sympathising man shall give himself to do it, and that by personal influence alone men shall be drawn and won from out of the darkness and filth. A loving heart and a sympathetic word, the exhibition of a Christian life and conduct, the fact of going down into the midst of evil and trying to lift men out of it, are the old-fashioned and only magnets by which men are drawn to purer and higher life. That is God's way of saving the world—by the action of single souls on single souls. Masses of men can neither save nor be saved. Not in groups, but one by one, particle by particle, soul by soul, Christ draws men to Himself, and He does His work in the world through single souls on fire with His love, and tender with pity learned of Him.

So, dear friends, do not think that any organisation, any corporate activity, any substitution of vicarious service, will solve the problem. It will not. There is only one way of doing it, the old way that we must tread if we are going to do anything for God and our fellows: "The priests repaired everyone over against his own house."

Let me briefly point out some very plain and obvious things which bear upon this matter of individual action. Let me remind you that if you are a Christian man you have in your possession the thing which will cure the world's woe, and possession involves responsibility. What would you think of a man that had a specific for some pestilence that was raging in a city, and was contented to keep it for his own use, or at most for his family's use, when his brethren were dying by the thousand, and their corpses polluting the air? And what shall we say of men and women who call themselves

Christians, who have some faith in that great Lord and His mighty sacrifice; who know that the men they meet with every day of their lives are dying for want of it, and who yet themselves do absolutely nothing to spread His name, and to heal men's hurts? What shall we say? God forbid that we should say they are not Christians; but God forbid that anybody should flatter them with the notion that they are anything but most inconsistent Christians.

Still further, need I remind you that if we have found anything in Jesus Christ which has been peace and rest for ourselves, Christ has thereby called us to this work? He has found and saved us, not only for our own personal good. That, of course, is the prime purpose of our salvation, but not its exclusive purpose. He has saved us too, in order that the Word may be spread through us to those beyond. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened," and every little bit of the dough, as it received into itself the leaven, and was transformed, became a medium for transmitting the transformation to the next particle beyond it and so the whole was at last permeated by the power. We get the grace for ourselves that we may pass it on; and as the Apostle says: "God hath shined into our hearts that we might give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

And you *can* do it, you Christian men and women, every one of you, and preach Him to some body. The possession of His love gives the commission; ay! and it gives the power. There is nothing so mighty as the confession of personal experience. Do not you think that when that first of Christian converts, and first of Christian preachers went to his brother, all full of what he had discovered, his simple saying, "We have found the

Messias," was a better sermon than a far more elaborate proclamation would have been? My brother! If you have found Him, you can say so; and if you can say so, and your character and your life confirm the words of your lips, you will have done more to spread His name than much eloquence and many an orator. All can preach, who can say, "We have found the Christ."

The last word I have to say is this: there is no other body that can do it but you. They say:—"What an awful thing it is that there are no churches or chapels in these outcast districts!" If there were they would be what the churches and chapels are now—half empty. Bricks and mortar built up into ecclesiastical forms are not the way to evangelise this or any other country. It is a very easy thing to build churches and chapels. It is not such an easy thing—I believe it is an impossible thing (and that the sooner the Christian Church gives up the attempt the better)—to get the Godless classes into any church or chapel. Conducted on the principles upon which churches and chapels must needs at present be conducted, they are for another class altogether; and we had better recognise it, because then we shall feel that no multiplication of buildings like this in which we now are, for instance, is any direct contribution to the evangelisation of the waste spots of the country, except in so far as from a centre like this there ought to go out much influence which will originate direct missionary action in places and fashions adapted to the outlying community.

Professional work is not what we want. Any man, be he minister, clergyman, Bible-reader, city missionary, who goes among our godless population with the suspicion of pay about him is the weaker for that. What is needed besides is that ladies and gentlemen that are a bit higher up in the social scale than these poor creatures, should go to them themselves; and excavate and work.

Preach, if you like, in the technical sense ; have meetings, I suppose, necessarily ; but the personal contact is the thing, the familiar talk, the simple exhibition of a loving Christian heart, and the unconventional proclamation in free conversation of the broad message of the love of God in Jesus Christ. Why, if all the people in this chapel who can do that would do it, and keep on doing it, who can tell what an influence would come from some hundreds of new workers for Christ? And why should the existence of a church in which the workers are as numerous as the Christians be an Utopian dream? It is simply the dream that perhaps a church might be conceived to exist, all the members of which had found out their plainest, most imperative duty, and were really trying to do it.

No carelessness, no indolence, no plea of timidity or business shift the obligation from your shoulders if you are a Christian. It is your business, and no paid agents can represent you. You cannot buy yourselves substitutes in Christ's army as they used to do in the mititia by a guinea subscription. We are thankful for the money, because there are kinds of work to be done that unpaid effort will not do. But they ask for your money ; Jesus Christ asks for yourself, for your work and will not let you off as having done your duty because you have paid your subscription. No doubt there are some of you who, from various circumstances, cannot yourselves do work amongst the masses of the outcast population. Well, but you have got people by your side whom you can help. The question which I wish to ask of my Christian brethren and sisters this morning is this : Is there a man, woman, or child living to whom you ever spoke a word about Jesus Christ? Is there? If not, do not you think it is time that you began?

There are people in your houses, people that sit by you in your counting-house on your college benches, who work by your side in mill or factory or warehouse, who cross your path in a hundred ways, and God has given them to you that you may bring them to Him. Do you set yourself, dear brother, to work and try to bring them. Oh! if you lived nearer Jesus Christ you would catch the sacred fire from Him; and like a bit of cold iron lying beside a magnet, touching Him, you would yourselves become magnetic and draw men out of their evil and up to God.

Let me commend to you the old pattern: "The priests repaired every one over against his house;" and beseech you to take the trowel and spade, or anything that comes handiest, and build in the bit nearest you some living stones on the true Foundation.

THE TRIPLE RAYS WHICH MAKE THE WHITE LIGHT OF HEAVEN.

SERMON X.

THE TRIPLE RAYS WHICH MAKE THE WHITE LIGHT OF HEAVEN.

"His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads." Rev. xxii. 3, 4.

ONE may well shrink from taking words like these for a text. Their lofty music will necessarily make all words of ours seem thin and poor. The great things about which they are concerned are so high above us, and known to us by so few channels that usually he who says least speaks most wisely about them. And yet it cannot be but wholesome if in a reverent spirit of no vain curiosity, we do try to lay upon our hearts the impressions of the great, though they be dim, truths which gleam from these words. I know that to talk about a future life is often a most sentimental, vague, unpractical form of religious contemplation, but there is no reason at all why it should be so. I wish to try now very simply to bring out the large force and wonderful meaning of the words which I have ventured to read. They give us three elements of the perfect state of man—Service, Contemplation, Likeness. These three are perfect and unbroken.

I.—The first element, then, in the perfect state of man is perfect activity in the service of God. Now the words of our text are remarkable in that the two expressions for "servant" and "serve" are not related to one another in the Greek, as they are in the English, but are two quite independent words; the former meaning literally "a slave," and the latter being exclusively confined in Scripture to one kind of service. It would never be employed for any service that a man did for a man; it is exclusively a religious word, and means only the service that men do for God, whether in specific acts of so-called worship or in the wider worship of daily life. So that if we have not here the notion of priesthood, we have one very closely approximating towards it; and the representation is that the activity of the redeemed and perfected man, in the highest ideal condition of humanity, is an activity which is all worship, and is directed to the revealed God in Christ.

That, then, is the first thought that we have to look at. Now, it seems to me to be a very touching confession of the weariness and unsatisfactoriness of life in general that the dream of the future which has unquestionably the most fascination for most men, is that which speaks of it as Rest. The religion which has the largest number of adherents in the world—the religion of the Buddhists—formally declares existence to be evil, and preaches as the highest attainable good, something which is scarcely distinguishable from annihilation. And, even though we do not go so far as that, what a testimony it is of burdened hearts and mournful lives, and work too great for the feeble limits of our powers, that the most natural thought of a blessed future is as rest! It is easy to laugh at people for singing hymns about sitting upon green and flowery mounts, and counting up the labours of their feet: but oh! it is a tragical thought that whatsoever shape a life has taken, howsoever full of joy and sunshine and brightness it may be, deep down in the man there is such an experience as that the one thing he wants is repose and to get rid of all the trouble and toil.

Now, this representation of my text is by no means contradictory, but it is complementary, of that other one. The deepest rest and the highest activity coincide. They do so in God Who "worketh hitherto" in undisturbed tranquility; they may do so in us. The wheel that goes round in swiftest rotation seems to be standing still. Work at its intensest, which is pleasurable work, and level to the capacity of the doer, is the truest form of rest. In vacuity there are stings and torment; it is only in joyous activity which is not pushed to the extent of strain and unwelcome effort that the true rest of man is to be found. And the two verses in this Book of Revelation about this matter, which look at first sight to be opposed to each other, are like the two sides of a sphere, which unite and make the perfect whole. "They rest from their labours." "They rest *not*, day nor night."

From their labours—yes; from toil disproportioned to faculty—yes! from unwelcome work—yes! from distraction and sorrow—yes! But from glad praise and vigorous service—never! day nor night. And so with the full apprehension of the sweetness and blessedness of the tranquil Heaven, we say: It is found only there, where His servants serve Him. Thus the first thought that is presented here is that of an activity delivered from all that makes toil on earth burdensome and unwelcome; and which, therefore, is coincident with the deepest and most perfect repose.

It may seem strange to think of a blessed life which has no effort in it, for effort is the very salt and spice of life here below, and one can scarcely fancy the perfect happiness of a spirit which never has the glow of warmth that comes from exercise in overcoming difficulties. But perhaps effort, and antagonism, and strain, and trial have done their work on us when they have moulded our characters, and when "school is over we burn the rod"; and the discipline of joy may evolve nobler graces of character than ever the discipline of sorrow did. At all events, we have to think of work which also is repose, and of service in which is unbroken tranquility.

Then there is further involved in this first idea, the notion of an outer world, on which and in which to work; and also the notion of the resurrection of the body, in which the active spirit may abide, and through which it may work.

Perhaps it may be that they who sleep in Jesus, in the period between the shuffling off of this mortal coil and the breaking of that day when they are raised again from the dead, are incapable of exertion in an outer sphere. Perhaps, it may be, that by reason of the absence of that glorified body of the Resurrection, they sleep in Jesus in the sense that they couch at the Shepherd's feet within the fold until the morning comes, when He leads them out to new pastures. It may be. At all events, this we may be sure of, that if it be so they have no desires in advance of their capacities; and of this also I think we may be sure, that whether they themselves can come into contact with an external Universe or not, Christ is for them in some measure what the body is to us here now, and the glorified body will be hereafter; that being absent from the body they are present with the Lord, and that He is as it were, the Sensorium by which they are brought into contact with and have a knowledge of external things, so that they may rest and wait and have no work to do, and have no effort to put forth, and yet be conscious of all that befalls the loved ones here below, may know them in their affliction, and not be untouched by their tears.

But all that is a dim region into which we have not any need to look. What I emphasize is, the service of Heaven means rest, and the service of Heaven means an outer universe on which, and a true bodily frame with which, to do the work which is delight.

The next point is this: such service must be in a far higher sphere and a far nobler fashion than the service of earth. That is in accordance with the analogy of the Divine dealings. God rewards work with more work. The powers that are trained and exercised and proved in a narrower region are lifted to the higher. As some poor peasant-girl, for instance, whose rich voice has risen up in the harvest-field only for her own delight and that of a handful of listeners, heard by some one who detects its sweetness, may be carried away to some great city, and charm kings with her tones, so the service done in some little corner of this remote rural province of God's universe, apprehended by Him, shall be rewarded with a wider platform, and a nobler area for work. "Thou hast been faithful in a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things." God sends forth His children to work as apprentices here, and when they are "out of their time," and have "got a trade," He calls them home, not to let their faculties rest unused, but to practice on a larger theatre what they have learned on earth.

One more point must be noticed, viz., that the highest type of Heaven's service must be service for other people. The law for Heaven can surely not be more selfish than the law for earth, and that is, "He that is chiefest amongst you let him be your servant." The law for the perfect man can surely not be different from the law for the Master, and the law for Him is, "Even Christ pleased not Himself." The perfection of the child can surely not be different from the perfection of the Father, and the perfection of the Father is : "He maketh His sun to 'shine,' and His blessings to come—on the unthankful and on the good."

So then the highest service for man is the service of others ;—how, where, or whom, we cannot tell. We too may be "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister" (Heb. i. 14), but at all events not on ourselves can our activities centre ; and not in self-culture can be the highest form of our service to God.

The last point about this first matter is simply this—that this highest form of human activity is all to be worship ; all to be done in reference to Him ; all to be done in submission to Him. The will of the man in His work is to be so conformed to the will of God as that, whatsoever the hand on the great dial points to, that the hand on the little dial shall point to also. Obedience is joy and rest. To know and to do His will is Heaven. It is Heaven on earth in so far as we partially attain to it, and when with enlarged powers and all imperfections removed, and in a higher sphere, and without interruptions we do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word, then the perfect state will have come. Then shall we enter into the liberty of the glory of the children of God, when, as His slaves, we serve Him in the unwearied activities done for Him, which make the worship of Heaven.

II.—Next, look at the second of the elements here :—"They shall see His face." Now that expression "seeing the face of God" in Scripture seems to me to be employed in two somewhat different ways, according to one of which the possibility of seeing the face is affirmed, and according to the other of which it is denied.

The one may be illustrated by the Divine word to Moses :—"Thou canst not see My face. There shall no man see Me and live." The other may be illustrated by the aspiration and the confidence of one of the psalms: "As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness."

A similar antithesis, which is apparently a contradiction, may be found in setting side by side the words of our Saviour:—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," with the words of the Evangelist; "No man hath seen God at any time." I do not think that the explanation is to be found altogether in pointing to the difference between present and possible future vision, but rather I think the Bible teaches what reason would also teach:—that no corporeal vision of God is ever possible; still further, that no complete comprehension and knowledge of Him is ever possible, and, as I think further, that no direct knowledge of, or contact with, God in Himself is possible for finite man, either here or yonder. And the other side lies in such words as these, which I have already quoted: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "As through a glass darkly, but then face to face." Where is the key to the apparent contradiction? Here, I think; Jesus Christ is the manifest God, in Him only do men draw near to the hidden Deity, the King Invisible, Who dwelleth in the light that is inaccessible.

Here on earth we see by faith, and yonder there will be a vision, different in kind, most real, most immediate and direct, not of the hidden Godhood in itself, but of the revealed Godhood manifest in Jesus Christ, Whom in His glorified corporeal Manhood we shall perceive, with the organs of our glorified body, Whom, in His Divine beauty we shall know and love with heart and mind, in knowledge direct, immediate, far surpassing in degree, and different in kind from, the knowledge of faith which we have of Him here below. But the infinite Godhood that lies behind all revelations of Deity shall remain as it hath been through them all—the King invisible, Whom no man hath seen or can see. They shall see His face in so far as they shall hold communion with and through their glorified body have the direct knowledge of Christ the revealed Deity.

Whether there be anything more, I know not ; I think there is not ; but this I am sure of, that the law for Heaven and the law for earth alike are, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

But there is another point I would touch upon in reference to this second thought of our text—viz, its connection with the previous representation, "They shall serve Him,"—that is work in an outer sphere ; "they shall see His face,"—that is contemplation. These two, the life of work and the life of devout communion—the Martha and the Mary of the Christian experience—are antagonistic here below, and it is hard to reconcile their conflicting, fluctuating claims and to know how much to give to the inward life of gazing upon Christ, and how much to the outward life of serving Him. But says my text, the two shall be blended together. "His servants shall serve Him," nor in all their activity shall they lose the vision of His face. His servants "shall see His face ;" nor in all the still blessedness of their gaze upon Him shall they slack the diligence of the unwearied hands, or the speed of the willing feet. The Rabbis taught that there were angels who serve, and angels who praise, but the two classes meet in the perfected man, whose services shall be praise, whose praise shall be service. They go forth to do His will, yet are ever in the House of the Lord. They work and gaze ; they gaze and work. Resting they serve, and serving they rest ; perpetual activity and perpetual vision are theirs. "They serve Him, and see His face."

III.—The last element is "His name shall be in their forehead." That is, as I take it—a mainfest likeness to the Lord Whom they serve is the highest element in the perfect state of redeemed men. We hear a good deal in this Book of the Revelation about writing the names and numbers of persons and of powers upon men's faces and foreheads; as for instance, you remember we read about the "number of the beast" written upon his worshippers, and about "the name of the New Jerusalem, and the name of my God" being written as a special reward, "upon him that overcomes." The metaphor, as I suppose is taken from the old cruel practice of branding a slave with the name of his master. And so the primary idea of this expression: "His slaves shall bear His name upon their foreheads," is that their ownership shall be conspicuously visible to all that look.

But there is more than that in it. How is the ownership to be made visible? By His name being on their foreheads. What is "His name"? Universally in Scripture "His name" is His revealed character, and so we come to this: the perfect men shall be known to belong to God in Christ, because they are like Him. The ownership shall be proved by the likeness, and that likeness shall no longer be hidden in their *hearts*, no longer be difficult to make out, so blurred and obliterated the letters of the name, by the imperfections of their lives and their selfishness and sin; but it shall flame in their foreheads, plain as the inscription on the high priest's mitre that declared him to be consecrated to the Lord.

And so that lovely and blessed thought is here of a perfect likeness in moral character, at all events, and a wonderful approximation and resemblance in other elements of human nature to the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ our Lord, which shall be the token that we are His.

Oh! what a contrast to the partial ownership, proved to be partial by our partial resemblance here on earth! We say, as Christian men and women, that we bear His name. Is it written so that men can read it, or is it like the name of some person traced in letters of gas jets over a shop-front—half blown out by every gust of wind that comes?

Is that the way in which His name is written on your heart and character. My brother! a possibility great and blessed opens before us of a nobler union with Him, a closer approximation, a clearer vision, a perfecter resemblance. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is!"

One last word. These three elements, service, contemplation, likeness; these three are not different in kind from the elements of a Christian man's life here. You can enjoy them all sitting in these pews; in the bustle and the hurry of your daily life, you can have every one of them. If you do not enjoy them here you will never have them yonder. If you have never served anybody but yourself how shall death make you His servant? If all the days of your life you have turned away your ear when He has been saying to you: "Seek ye my face," what reason is there to expect that when death's hammer smashes the glass through which you have seen darkly, "the steady whole of that awful face" will be a pleasant sight to you? If all your life you have been trying, as some of you men and women, old and young, have been trying, and are trying now, to engrave the name of the beast upon your foreheads, what reason have you to expect that when you pass out of this life the foul signs shall disappear in a moment, and you will bear in your brow "the marks of the Lord Jesus" in their stead? No! No! These things do not happen; you have got to begin here as you mean to end yonder. Trust Him here, and you will see Him there. Serve Him here, and you will serve Him yonder. Write His new Name upon your heart, and when you pass from the imperfections of life you will bear His Name on your foreheads.

And if you do not—I lay this upon the consciences of you all,—if you do not you will see Christ;—and you will not like it! And you will bear, not the Image of the Heavenly, which is life, but the image of the earthy, which is death and hell!

THE SECRET OF GLADNESS.

SERMON XI.

THE SECRET OF GLADNESS.

> "And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" Mark ii. 19.

THIS is part of our Lord's answer to the question put by John's disciples as to the reason for the omission of the practice of fasting by his followers. The answer is very simple. It is—" My disciples do not fast because they are not sad." And the principle which underlies the answer is a very important one. It is this: that all outward forms of religion, appointed by man, ought only to be observed when they correspond to the feeling and disposition of the worshipper. That principle cuts up all religious formalism by the very roots. The Pharisee said:—" Fasting is a good thing in itself, and meritorious in the sight of God." The modern Pharisee says the same about many externals of ritual and worship, Jesus Christ says " No! The thing has no value except as an expression of the feeling of the doer." Our Lord did not object to fasting; He expressly approved of it as a means of spiritual power. But he did object to the formal use of it or of any outward form. The formalist's form, whether it be the elaborate ritual of the Catholic Church, or the barest

Nonconformist service, or the silence of a Friends' meeting-house, is rigid, unbending and cold, like an iron rod. The true Christian form is elastic, like the stem of a palm tree, which curves and sways and yields to the wind, and has the sap of life in it. If any man is sad, let him fast; "if any man is merry let him sing psalms." Let his ritual correspond to his spiritual emotion and conviction.

But the point which I wish to consider now is not so much this, as the representation that is given here of the reason why fasting was incongruous with the condition and disposition of the disciples. Jesus says:—"We are more like a wedding-party than anything else. Can the children of the bridechamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?"

The "children of the bridechamber" is but another name for those who were called the "friends" or companions "of the bridegroom." According to the Jewish wedding ceremonial it was their business to conduct the bride to the home of her husband, and there to spend seven days in festivity and rejoicing, which were to be so entirely devoted to mirth and feasting that the companions of the bridegroom were by the Talmudic ritual absolved even from prayer and from worship, and had for their one duty to rejoice.

And that is the picture that Christ holds up before the disciples of the ascetic John as the representation of what He and His friends were most truly like. Very unlike our ordinary notion of Christ and His disciples as they walked the earth! The presence of the Bridegroom made them glad with a strange gladness, which shook off sorrow as the down on a sea-bird's breast shakes off moisture, and leaves it warm and dry, though it floats amidst boundless seas. I wish to-day to meditate with you on this secret of imperviousness to sorrow arising from the felt presence of the Christ.

There are three subjects for consideration arising from the words of my text: The Bridegroom—the presence of the Bridegroom—the joy of the Bridegroom's presence.

I.—Now with regard to the first, a very few words will suffice. The first thing that strikes me is the singular appropriateness, and the delicate pathetic beauty in the employment of this name by Christ in the existing circumstances. Who was it that had first said: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom that standeth by and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled?" Why, it was the master of these very men who were asking the question. John's disciples came and said: "Why do not your disciples fast?" And our Lord reminded them of their own teacher's words, when he said, "The friend of the bridegroom can only be glad." And so He would say to them, "In your master's own conception of what I am, and of the joy that comes from my presence, you have an answer to your question. He might have taught you who I am, and why it is that the men that stand around Me are glad."

But this is not all. We cannot but connect this name with a whole circle of ideas found in the Old Testament, especially with that most familiar and almost stereotyped figure which represents the union between Israel and Jehovah, under the emblem of the marriage bond. The Lord is the husband; and the nation whom He has loved and redeemed and chosen for Himself, is the wife; unfaithful and forgetful, often requiting love with indifference, and protection with unthankfulness, and needing to be put away, and debarred of the society of the husband that still yearns for her; but a wife still, and in the new time to be joined to Him by a bond that shall never be broken and a better covenant.

And so Christ lays His hand upon all that old history and says: "It is fulfilled here in Me." A familiar note in Old Testament Messianic prophecy too is caught and echoed here, especially that grand marriage ode of the forty-fifth Psalm, in which he must be a very prosaic or very deeply prejudiced reader who hears nothing more than the shrill wedding greetings at the marriage of some Jewish king with a foreign princess. Its bounding hopes and its magnificent sweep of vision are a world too wide for such interpretation. The Bridegroom of that psalm is the Messiah, and the Bride is the Church.

I need only refer in a sentence to what this indicates of Christ's self-consciousness. What must He, who takes this name as His own, have thought Himself to be to the world, and the world to Him? He steps into the place of the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and claims as His own all these great and wonderful prophecies. He promises love, protection, communion, the deepest, most mystical union of spirit and heart with Himself; and He claims quiet, restful confidence in His love, absolute, loving obedience to His authority, reliance upon His strong hand and loving heart, and faithful cleaving to Him. The Bridegroom of humanity, the Husband of the world, if it will only turn to Him, is Christ Himself.

II.—But a word as to the presence of the Bridegroom. It might seem as if this text condemned us who love an unseen and absent Lord to exclusion from the joy which is made to depend on His presence. Are we in the dreary period when "the bridegroom is taken away" and fasting appropriate?"

Surely not. The time of mourning for an absent Christ was only three days; the law for the years of the Church's history between the moment when the uplifted eyes of the gazers lost Him in the symbolic cloud and the moment when He shall come again is, "Lo, I am with you always." The absent Christ is the present Christ. He is really with us, not as the memory or the influence of the example of the dead may be said to remain, not as the spirit of a teacher may be said to abide with his school of followers. We say that Christ has gone up on high and sits on the right hand of God. The right hand of God is His active power. Where is "the right hand of God?" It is wherever His divine energy works. He that sits at the right hand of God is thereby declared to be wherever the Divine energy is in operation, and to be Himself the wielder of that Divine Power. I believe in a local abode of the glorified human body of Jesus Christ now, but I believe likewise that all through God's Universe, and eminently in this world, which He has redeemed, Christ is present in His consciousness of its circumstances, and in the activity of His influence, and in whatsoever other incomprehensible and unspeakable mode Omnipresence belongs to a Divine Person. So that He is with us most really, though the visible, bodily Form is no longer by our sides.

That Presence which survives, which is true for us here to-day, may be a far better and more blessed and real thing than the presence of the mere bodily Form in which He once dwelt. We may have lost something by His going away in visible form; I doubt whether we have. We have lost the manifestation of Him to the sense, but we have gained the manifestation of Him to the spirit. And just as the great men, who are only men, need to die and go away in order to be measured in their true magnitude and understood in their true glory; and just as when a man is in amongst the mountains, he cannot tell which peak is the dominant one, but when he gets away a little bit across the sea and looks back, distance helps to measure magnitude and reveal the sovereign summit which towers above all the rest, so looking back across the ages with the foreground between us and Him of the history of the Christian Church ever since, and noticing how other heights have sunk beneath the waves and have been wrapped in clouds, and have disappeared behind the great round of the earth, we can tell how high this One is; and know better than they knew Who it is that moves amongst men in the form of a servant, even the Bridegroom of the Church and of the world. "It is expedient for you that I go away." And Christ is, or ought to be nearer to us to-day in all that constitutes real nearness, in our apprehension of His essential character, in our reception of His holiest influences, than He ever was to them who walked beside Him on the earth.

But, brethren, that presence is of no use at all to us unless we daily try to realise it. He was with these men whether they would or no. Whether they thought about Him or no, there He was; and just because His presence did not at all depend upon their spiritual condition, it was a lower kind of presence than that which you and I have now, and which depends for us altogether on our realising it by the turning of our hearts to Him, and by the daily contemplation of Him amidst all the bustle and the struggle.

Do you, as you go about your work, feel His nearness and try to keep the feeling fresh and vivid, by occupying heart and mind with Him, by referring everything to His supreme control? By trusting yourselves utterly and absolutely in His hand, and gathering round you, as it were, the sweetness of His love by meditation and reflection, do you try to make conscious to yourselves your Lord's presence with you? If you do, that presence is to you a blessed reality; if you do not, it is a word that means nothing and is of no help, no stimulus, no protection, no satisfaction, no sweetness to you whatever. The children of the Bridegroom are glad only when, and as, they know that the Bridegroom is with them.

III.—And now a word, last of all, about the joy of the Bridegroom's presence. What was it that made these rude lives so glad when Christ was with them; filling them with strange new sweetness and power? The charm of personal character, the charm of contact with one whose lips were bringing to them fresh revelations of truth, fresh visions of God, whose whole life was the exhibition of a nature, beautiful, and noble, and pure, and tender and sweet, and loving, beyond anything they had ever seen before.

Ah! brethren, there is no joy in the world like that of companionship, in the freedom of perfect love, with one who ever keeps us at our best, and brings the treasures of ever fresh truth to the mind, as well as beauty of character to admire and imitate. That is one of the greatest gifts that God gives, and is a source of the purest joy that we can have.

Now you may have all that and much more in Jesus Christ. He will be with us if we do not drive Him away from us, as the source of our purest joy, because He is the all-sufficient object for our love.

Oh! you men and women who have been wearily seeking in the world for love that cannot change, for love that cannot die and leave you; you who have been made sad for life by irrevocable losses, or sorrowful in the midst of your joy by the anticipated certain separation which is to come, listen to this One who says to you: "I will never leave thee, and My love shall be round thee for ever;" and recognise this, that there is a love which cannot change, which cannot die, which has no limits, which never can be cold, which never can disappoint, and therefore, in it, and in His presence there is unending gladness.

He is with us as the source of our joy, because He is the Lord of our lives, and the absolute Commander of our Wills. To have One present with us Whose loving word it is delight to obey, and Who takes upon Himself all responsibility for the conduct of our lives, and leaves us only the task of doing what we are bid—that is peace, that is gladness, of such a kind as none else in the world gives.

He is with us as the ground of perfect joy because He is the adequate object of all our desires, and the whole of the faculties and powers of a man will find a field of glad activity in leaning upon Him, and realising His presence. Like the Apostle whom the old painters loved to represent lying with his happy head on Christ's heart, and his eyes closed in a tranquil rapture of restful satisfaction, so if we have Him with us and feel that He is with us, our spirits may be still, and in the great stillness of fruition of all our wishes and the fulfilment of all our needs, may know a joy that the world can neither give nor take away.

He is with us as the source of endless gladness in that He is the defence and protection for our souls. And as men live in a victualled fortress, and care not though the whole surrounding country may be swept bare of all provision, so when we have Christ with us we may feel safe, whatsoever befalls, and "in the days of famine we shall be satisfied."

He is with us as the source of our perfect joy because His presence is the kindling of every hope that fills the future with light and glory. Dark or dim at the best, trodden by uncertain shapes, casting many a deep shadow over the present, that future lies, except we see it illumined by Christ, and have Him by our sides. But if we possess His companionship, the present is but the parent of a more blessed time to come; and we can look forward and feel that nothing can touch our gladness, because nothing can touch our union with our Lord.

So, dear brethren, from all these thoughts and a thousand more which I have no time to dwell upon, comes this one great consideration, that the joy of the presence of the Bridegroom is the victorious antagonist of all sorrow and mourning. "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn whilst the bridegroom is with them?" The answer sometimes seems to be, "Yes, they can!" Our own hearts, with their experience of tears, and losses, and disappointments, seem to say: "Mourning is possible, even whilst He is here. We have our own share, and we sometimes think, more than our share of the ills that flesh is heir to."

And we have, over and above them, in the measure in which we are Christians, certain special sources of sorrow and trial, peculiar to ourselves alone; and the deeper and truer our Christianity the more of these shall we have. But notwithstanding all that, what will the felt presence of the Bridegroom do for these griefs that will come? Well, it will limit them for one thing; it will prevent them from absorbing the whole of our nature. There will always be a Goshen in which there is light in the dwelling, however murky may be the darkness that wraps the land. There will always be a little bit of soil above the surface, however weltering and wide may be the inundation that drowns our world. There will always be a dry and warm place in the midst of the winter, a kind of greenhouse into which we may get from out of the tempest and the fog. The joy of the Bridegroom's presence will last through the sorrow, like a spring of fresh water welling up in the midst of the sea. We may have the salt and the sweet waters mingling in our lives, not sent forth by one fountain, but flowing in one channel.

Our joy will sometimes be made sweeter and more wonderful by the very presence of the mourning and the grief. Just as the pillar of cloud, that glided before the Israelites through the wilderness, glowed into a pillar of fire as the darkness deepened, so, as the outlook around becomes less and less cheery and bright, and the night falls thicker and thicker, what seemed to be but a thin grey wavering column in the blaze of the sunlight will gather warmth and brightness at the heart of it when the midnight comes.

You cannot see the stars at twelve o'clock in the day; you have to watch for the dark hours ere heaven is filled with glory. And so sorrow is often the occasion for the full revelation of the joy of Christ's presence.

Why have so many Christian men so little joy in their lives? Because they look for it in all sorts of wrong places, and seek to wring it out of all sorts of sapless and dry things. "Do men gather grapes of thorns?" If you put the berries of the thorn into the winepress, will you get sweet sap out of them? That is what you are doing when you take gratified earthly affections, worldly competence, fulfilled ambitions, and put them into the press, and think that out of these you can squeeze the wine of gladness. No! No! brethren, dry and sapless and juiceless they all are. There is one thing that gives a man worthy, noble, eternal gladness, and that is the felt presence of the Bridegroom.

Why have so many Christians so little joy in their lives?

A religion like that of John's disciples and that of the Pharisees is a poor affair. A religion of which the main features are law and restriction and prohibition, cannot be joyful. And there are a great many people who call themselves Christians, and have just got religion enough to take the edge off worldly pleasures, and yet they have not got enough to make fellowship with Christ a gladness for them.

There is a cry amongst us for a more cheerful type of religion. I re-echo the cry, but am afraid that I do not mean by it quite the same thing that some of my friends do. A more cheerful type of Christianity means to many of us a type of Christianity that will interfere less with my amusements; a more indulgent doctor that will prescribe a less rigid diet than the old Puritan type used to do. Well, perhaps they went too far; I do not care to deny that. But the only cheerful Christianity is a Christianity that draws its gladness from deep personal experience of communion with Jesus Christ. There is no way of men being religious and happy except being profoundly religious, and living very near their Master, and always trying to cultivate that spirit of communion with Him which shall surround them with the sweetness and the power of His felt presence. We do not want Pharisaic fasting, but we do want that the reason for not fasting shall not be that Christians like eating better, but that their religion must be joyful because they have Christ with them, and therefore cannot choose but sing, as a lark cannot choose but carol. "Religion has no power over us, but as it is our happiness," and we shall never make it our happiness, and therefore never know its beneficent control, until we lift it clean out of the low region of outward forms and joyless service, into the blessed heights of communion with Jesus Christ, "whom having not seen we love."

I would that Christian people saw more plainly that joy is a duty, and that they are bound to make efforts to obey the command, "Rejoice in the Lord always," no less than other precepts. If we abide in Christ, His joy will abide in us, and our joy will be full. We shall have in our hearts a fountain of true joy which will never be turbid with earthly stains, nor dried up by heat, nor frozen by cold. If we set the Lord always before us our days may be at once like the happy hours of the children of the bridechamber, bright with gladness and musical with song; and also, saved from the enervation that sometimes comes from joy, because thay are like the patient vigils of the servants who wait for the Lord, when He shall return from the wedding. So strangely blended of fruition and hope, of companionship and solitude, of feasting and watching, is the Christian life here, until the time comes when His friends go in with the Bridegroom to the banquet, and drink for ever of the new joy of the kingdom.

THE LESSON OF MEMORY.

SERMON XII.

THE LESSON OF MEMORY.

"Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart whether thou wouldst keep His commandments or no." Deut. viii. 2.

THE strand of our lives usually slips away smoothly enough, but days such as this, the last Sunday in a year, are like the knots on a sailor's log, which, as they pass through his fingers, tell him how fast it is being paid out off the reel, and how far it has run.

They suggest a momentary consciousness of the swift passage of life, and naturally lead us to a glance backwards and forwards, both of which occupations ought to be very good for us. The dead flat upon which we live here may be taken as an emblem of the low present in which most of us are content to pass our lives, affording nowhere a distant view, and never enabling us to see more than a street's length ahead of us. It is a good thing to get up upon some little elevation sometimes, and take a wider view, backward and forward.

And so this morning I venture to let the season preach to us, and to confine myself simply to suggesting for you one or two very plain and obvious thoughts which may help to make our retrospect wise and useful. And there are two main considerations which I wish to submit. The first is—what we ought to be chiefly occupied with as we look back; and secondly, what the issue of such a retrospect ought to be.

I.—What we should be mainly occupied with as we look back. Memory, like all other faculties, may either help us or hinder us. As is the man, so will be his remembrance. The tastes which rule his present will determine the things that he likes best to think about in the past. There are many ways of going wrong in our retrospect. Some of us, for instance, prefer to think with pleasure about things that ought never to have been done, and to give a wicked immortality to thoughts that ought never to have had a being. Some men's tastes and inclinations are so vitiated and corrupted that they find a joy in living their badnesses over again. Some of us, looking back on the days that are gone, select by instinctive preference for remembrance, the vanities and frivolities and trifles which were the main things in them whilst they lasted. Such a use of the great faculty of memory is like the folly of the Egyptians who embalmed cats and vermin. Do not let us be of those, who have in their memories nothing but rubbish, or something worse, who let down the drag-net into the depths of the past and bring it up full only of mud and foulnesses, and of ugly monsters that never ought to have been dragged into the daylight.

Then there are some of us who abuse memory just as much by picking out, with perverse ingenuity, every black bit that lies in the distance behind us, all the disappointments, all the losses, all the pains, all the sorrows. Some men look back and say, with Jacob in one of his moods, "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life!" Yes! and the same man, when he was in a better spirit said, and a great deal more truly, "The God that fed me all my life long, the angel which redeemed me from all evil." Do not paint like Rembrandt, even if you do not paint like Turner. Do not dip your brush only in the blackness, even if you cannot always dip it in molten sunshine!

And there are some of us who, in like manner, spoil all the good that we could get out of a wise retrospect by only looking back in such a fashion as to feed a sentimental melancholy, which is, perhaps, the most profitless of all the ways of looking backwards.

Now here are the two points, in this verse of my text, which would put all these blunders and all others right, telling us what we should chiefly think about when we look back, and from what point of view the retrospect of the past must be taken in order that it should be salutary. "Thou shalt remember all the way by which the Lord thy God hath led thee." Let memory work under the distinct recognition of Divine guidance in every part of the past. That is the *first* condition of making the retrospect blessed. "To humble thee and to prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep His commandments or no." Let us look back with a clear recognition of the fact that the use of life is to test, and reveal, and to make character. This world, and all its outward engagements, duties and occupations, is but a scaffolding, on which the builders may stand to rear the true temple, and when the building is reared you may do what you like with the scaffolding. So we have to look back on life from this point of view, that its joys and sorrows, its ups and downs, its work and repose, all the vicissitudes and sometimes contrariety of its circumstances and conditions, are all for the purpose of making *us*, and of making plain to ourselves, what we are. "To humble thee," that is, to knock the self-confidence out of us, and to bring us to say:—"I am nothing and Thou art everything; I myself am a poor weak rag of a thing that needs

Thy hand to stiffen me, or I shall not be able to resist or to do." That is one main lesson that life is meant to teach us. Whoever has learnt to say by reason of the battering and shocks of time, by reason of sorrows and failures, by reason of joys, too, and fruition,—"Lord, I come to Thee as depending upon Thee for everything," has got the supreme good out of life, and has fufilled the purpose of the Father, who has led us all these years, to humble us into the wholesome diffidence that says: "Not in myself, but in Thee is all my strength and my hope."

I need not do more than remind you of the other cognate purposes which are suggested here. Life is meant, not only to bring us to humble self-distrust, as a step towards devout dependence on God, but also to reveal us to ourselves, for we only know what we are by reflecting on what we have done; and the only path by which self-knowledge can be attained is the path of observant recollection of our conduct in daily life.

Another purpose for which the whole panorama of life is made to pass before us, and for which all the gymnastics of life exercise us, is that we may be made submissive to the great Will, and may keep His commandments.

These thoughts then should be with us in our retrospect, and our retrospect will be blessed:—First, we are to look back and see God's guidance everywhere, and second, we are to judge of the things that we remember by their tendency to make character, to make us humble, to reveal us to ourselves, and to knit us in glad obedience to our Father God.

II.—And now turn to the other consideration which may help to make remembrance a good, viz, the issues to which our retrospect must tend, if it is to be anything more than sentimental recollection.

First let me say:—Remember and be thankful. If what I have been saying be true, as to the standard by which events are to be tried; if it be the case that the main fact about things is their power to mould persons and to make character, then there follows, very plainly and clearly, that all things that come within the sweep of our memory may equally contribute to our highest good.

Good does not mean pleasure. Bright being may not always be well being, and the highest good has a very much nobler meaning than comfort and satisfaction. And so, realising the fact that the best of things is that they shall make us like God, then we can turn to the past and judge it wisely, because then we shall see that all the diversity, and even the opposition of circumstances and events, may co-operate towards the same end. Suppose two wheels in a great machine, one turns from right to left and the other from left to right, but they fit into one another, and they both produce one final result of motion. So the movements in my life which I call blessings and gladness, and the movements in my life which I call sorrows and tortures; these may work into each other, and they will do so if I take hold of them rightly, and use them as they ought to be used. They will tend to the highest good whether they be light or dark; even as night with its darkness and its dews has its ministration and mission of mercy for the wearied eye no less than day with its brilliancy and sunshine; even as the summer and the winter are equally needful, and equally good for the crop. So in our lives it is good for us, sometimes, that we be brought into the dark places; it is good for us sometimes that the leaves be stripped from the trees, and the ground be bound with frost.

And so for both kinds of weather, dear brethren, we have to remember and be thankful. It is a hard lesson, I know for some of us. There may be some listening to me whose memory goes back to this dying year as the year that has held the sorest sorrow of their lives; to whom it has brought some loss that has made earth dark. And it seems hard to tell quivering lips to be thankful, and to bid a man, whose eyes fill with tears, to be grateful, as he looks back on such a past. But yet it is true that it is good for us to be drawn or to be driven to Him ; it is good for us to have to tread even a lonely path if it makes us lean more on the arm of our Beloved. It is good for us to have places made empty if, as in the year when Israel's King died, we shall thereby have our eyes purged to behold the Lord sitting on the Royal Seat.

"Take it on trust a little while,
Thou soon shalt read the mystery right,
In the full sunshine of His smile."

And for the present let us try to remember that He dwelleth in the darkness as in the light, and that we are to be thankful for the things that help us to be near Him, and not only for the things that make us outwardly glad. So I venture to say even to those of you that may be struggling with sad remembrances, remember and be thankful.

I have no doubt there are many in this congregation who look back, if not upon a year desolated by some blow that never can be repaired, yet upon a year in which failing resources and declining business, or diminished health, or broken spirits, or a multitude of minute but most disturbing cares and sorrows do make it hard to recognise the loving Hand in all that comes. Yet to such, too, I would say : "All things work together for good," therefore all things are to be embraced in the thankfulness of our retrospect.

The second. and simple practical suggestion that I make is this : Remember, and let the memory lead to contrition. Perhaps I am speaking to some men or women for whom this dying year holds the memory of some great lapse from goodness ; some young man who for the first time has been tempted to sensuous sin ; some man who may have been led into slippery places in regard of business integrity. I draw a "bow at a venture" when I speak of such things—perhaps somebody is listening to me who would give a great deal if he or she could forget a certain past moment of this dying year—which makes their cheeks hot yet whilst they think of it. To such I say: Remember! Go close into the presence of the black thing, and get the consciousness of it driven into your heart; for the remembrance is the first step to deliverance from the load, and to your passing, emancipated from the bitterness, into the year that lies before you.

But even if I have not people here to whom such remarks would apply, let us all summon up to ourselves the memories of these bygone days. In all the three hundred and sixty-five of them, my friend, how many moments stand out distinct before you as moments of high communion with God? How many times can you remember of devout consecration to Him? How many, when—as the people on the Riviera reckon the number of days on the season in which, far across the water, they have seen Corsica—you can remember this year to have beheld, faint and far away, "the mountains that are round about" the Jerusalem that is above? How many moments do you remember of consecration and service, of devotion to your God and your fellows? Oh! what a miserable, low-lying stretch of God-forgetting monotony our life looks when we are looking back at it in the mass. One film of mist is scarcely visible, but when you get a mile of it you can tell what it is—oppressive darkness. One drop of muddy water does not show its pollution, but when you get a pitcherful of it you can see how thick it is. And so a day or an hour looked back upon may not reveal the true godlessness of the average life, but if you will take the twelvemonth and think about it, and ask yourselves a question or two about it, I think you will feel that the only attitude for any of us in looking back across a stretch of such brown barren moorland is that of penitent prayer for forgiveness and for cleansing.

But I daresay that some of you say :—"Oh ! I look back and I do not feel anything of that kind of thing that you describe ; I have done my duty and nobody can blame me. I am quite comfortable in my retrospect. Of course there have been imperfections ; we are all human, and these need not trouble a man." Let me ask you, dear brother, one question ; do you believe that the law of a man's life is : "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind ; and thy neighbour as thyself ?" Do you believe that that is what you ought to do ? Have you done it ? If you have not, let me beseech you not to go out of this year, across the artificial and imaginary boundary that separates you from the next, with the old guilt upon your back, but go to Jesus Christ, and ask Him to forgive you, and then you may pass into the coming twelvemonth without the intolerable burden of unremembered, unconfessed, and therefore unforgiven sin.

The next point that I would suggest is this : Let us remember in order that from the retrospect we may get practical wisdom. It is astonishing what unteachable, untameable creatures men are. They gain wisdom by experience about all the little matters of daily life, but they do not seem to do so about the higher. Even a sparrow gets to understand a scarecrow after a time or two, and any rat in a hole will learn the trick of a trap. But you can trick men over and over again with the same inducement, and, even whilst the hook is sticking in their jaws, the same bait will tempt them once more. That is very largely the case because they do not observe and remember what has happened to them in bygone days.

There are two things that any man, who will bring his reason and common sense to bear upon the honest estimate and retrospect of the facts of his life, may be fully convinced of. These are, first, his own weakness. One main use of a wise retrospect is to teach us where we are weakest. What an absurd thing it would be if the inhabitants of a Dutch village were to let the sea come in at the same gap in the same dyke a dozen times! What an absurd thing it would be if a city were captured over and over again by assault from the same point, and did not strengthen its defences there! But that is exactly what you do; and all the while, if you would only think about your own past lives wisely and reasonably, and like men with brains in your heads, you might find out where it was that you were most open to assault; what it was in your character that needed most strengthening, what it was wherein the devil caught you most quickly, and so build yourselves up in the most defenceless points.

Do not look back for sentimental melancholy; do not look back with unavailing regrets; do not look back to torment yourselves with useless self-accusation; but look back to see how good God has been, and look back to see where you are weak and pile the wall higher there, and so learn practical wisdom from retrospect.

Another phase of practical wisdom which memory should give is deliverance from the illusions of sense and time. Remember how much the world has ever done for you in by-gone days. Why should you let it befool you once again? If it has proved itself a liar when it has tempted you with gilded offers that came to nothing, and with beauty that was no more solid than the "Easter-eggs" that you buy in the shops—painted sugar with nothing inside, why should you believe it when it comes to you once more? Why not say: "Ah! once burnt twice shy! You have tried that trick on me before, and

I have found it out!" Let the retrospect teach us how hollow life is without God, and let it so draw us nearer to Him.

The last thing that I would say is: Let us remember that we may hope. It is the prerogative of Christian remembrance, that it merges into Christian hope. The forward look and the backward look are really but the exercise of the same faculty in two different directions. Memory does not always imply hope, we remember sometimes because we do not hope, and try to gather round ourselves the vanished past because we know it never can be a present or a future. But when we are occupied with an unchanging Friend, whose love is inexhaustible, and whose arm is unwearied, it is good logic to say; "It has been, therefore it shall be."

With regard to this fleeting life, it is a delusion to say "to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant," but with regard to the life of the soul that lives in God, that is true, and true for ever. The past is a specimen of the future. The future for the man that lives in Christ is but the prolongation, and the heightening into superlative excellence and beauty of all that is good in the past and in the present. As the radiance of some rising sun may cast its bright beams into the opposite sky, even so the glowing past behind us flings its purples and its golds and its scarlets on to the else dim curtain of the future.

Remember that you may hope. A paradox, but a paradox that is a truth in the case of Christians whose memory is of a God that has loved and blessed them; whose hope is in a God that changes never; whose memory is charged with every good and perfect gift that came down from the Father of Lights, whose hope is in that same Father, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." So on every stone of remembrance, every Ebenezer on which is graved: "Hitherto hath the

Lord helped us," we can mount a telescope—if I may so say—that will look into the furthest glories of the heavens, and be sure that the past will be magnified and perpetuated in the future. Our prayer may legitimately be: "Thou hast been my help, leave me not, neither forsake me!" And His answer will be: "I will leave thee not until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Remember that you may hope, and hope because you remember.

NOW, NOW!—NOT BY-AND-BYE.

A SERMON TO THE YOUNG.

SERMON XIII.

NOW, NOW—NOT BY-AND-BYE.

A SERMON TO THE YOUNG.

"And as Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." Acts xxiv. 25.

FELIX and his brother had been favourite slaves of the Emperor, and so had won great power at court. At the date of this incident he had been for some five or six years the procurator of the Roman province of Judea; and how he used his power the historian Tacitus tells us in one of his bitter sentences, in which he says, "He wielded his kingly authority with the spirit of a slave, in all cruelty and lust."

He had tempted from her husband, Drusilla, a daughter of that Herod whose dreadful death is familiar to us all; and his court reeked with blood and debauchery. He is here face to face with Paul for the second time. On a former interview he had seen good reason to conclude that the Roman Empire was not in much danger from this one Jew whom his countrymen, with suspicious loyalty, were charging with sedition; and so he had allowed him a very large margin of liberty.

On this second occasion he had sent for him evidently not as a judge, but partly with a view to try to get a bribe out of him, and partly because he had some kind of languid interest, as most Romans then had, in Oriental thought,—some languid interest perhaps too in this strange man. Or he and Drusilla were possibly longing for a new sensation, and not indisposed to give a moment's glance at Paul, with his singular ideas.

So they called for the Apostle, and the guilty couple got a good deal more than they bargained for. Paul does not speak to them as a Greek philosopher, anxious to please high personages, might have done, but he goes straight at their sins; "He reasons of righteousness" with the unjust judge, "of temperance" with the self-indulgent, sinful pair, "of the judgment to come" with these two, who thought that they could do anything they liked with impunity. Christianity has sometimes to be exceedingly rude in reference to the sins of the upper classes.

As Paul goes on, a strange fear began to creep about the heart of Felix. It is the watershed of his life that he has come to, the crisis of his fate. Everything depends on the next five minutes. Will he yield? Will he resist? The tongue of the balance trembles and hesitates for a moment and then, but slowly, the wrong scale goes down. "Go thy way for this time."

Ah! If he had said: "Come and help me to get rid of this strange fear," how different all might have been! The metal was at the very point of melting. What shape would it take? It ran into the wrong mould, and, as far as we know, it was hardened there. "It might have been once, and he missed it, lost it forever." No sign marked out that moment from the common uneventful moments, though it saw the death of a soul.

Now, my dear young friends, I am not going to say anything more to you of this man and his character, but I wish to take this incident and its lessons and urge them on your hearts and consciences.

I.—Let me say a word or two about the fact, of which this incident is an example, and of which I am afraid many of your lives would furnish other examples, that men lull awakened consciences to sleep and excuse delay in deciding for Christ by half-honest promises to attend to religion at some future time.

"Go thy way for this time" is what Felix is really anxious about. His one thought is to get rid of Paul and his disturbing message for the present. But he does not wish to shut the door altogether. He gives a sop to his conscience to stop its barking, and he probably deceives himself as to the gravity of his present decision by the lightly given, and well-guarded promise with its indefiniteness, "When I have a convenient season I will send for thee." The thing he really means is—Not now, at all events: the thing he hoodwinks himself with is, By-and-bye. Now that is what I know some of you are doing; and my purpose and earnest prayer is to bring you to-night to the decision which by one vigorous act of your wills will settle the question for the future as to which God you are going to follow.

So, then, I have just one or two things to say about this first part of my subject. Let me remind you that however beautiful, however gracious, however tender, and full of love and mercy, and good tidings the message of God's love in Jesus Christ is, there is another side to it, a side which is meant to rouse men's consciences and to awaken men's fears.

You bring a man like the man in this story, Felix, or a very much better man than he—any of us that are here to night—into contact with these three thoughts:—"Righteousness, temperance, judgment to come," and the effect of a direct appeal to moral convictions will always be more or less to awaken a sense of failure, insufficiency, defect, sin ; and to create a certain creeping dread that if I set myself against the great law of God, that law of God will have a way of crushing me. The fear is well founded, and not only does the contemplation of God's *law* excite it. God's Gospel comes to us, and just because it is a gospel, and is intended to lead you and me to love and trust Jesus Christ, and give our whole hearts and souls to Him—just because it is the best "good news" that ever came into the world, it begins often (not always, perhaps,) by making a man feel what a sinful man he is, and how he has gone against God's law, and how there hang over him, by the very necessities of the case and the constitution of the universe, consequences bitter and painful. Now, I believe that there are very few people who, like you, come occasionally into contact with the preaching of the truth, who have not had their moments when they felt—"Yes ! it is all true—it is all true. I *am* bad, and I *have* broken God's law, and there is a dark look-out before me !" I believe that most of us know what that feeling is.

And now my next step is—that the awakened conscience is just like the sense of pain in the physical world, it has got a work to do, and a mission to perform. It is meant to warn you off dangerous ground. Thank God for pain ! It keeps off death many a time. And in like manner thank God for a swift conscience that speaks. It is meant to ring an alarm-bell to us, to make us, as the Bible has it, "flee for refuge to the hope that is set before us." My imploring question to my young friends now is : "Have you used that sense of evil and wrong doing, when it has been aroused in your consciences, to lead you to Jesus Christ, or what have you done with it ?"

There are two men in this book of the Acts of the Apostles who pass through the same stages of feeling up to a certain point, and then they diverge. And the two men's outline history is the best sermon that I can preach upon this point. Felix becoming afraid, recoils, shuts himself up, puts away the thing that disturbs him and settles himself back into his evil. The Philippian jailor becoming afraid (the phrases in the original being almost identical), like a sensible man tries to find out the reason of his fear, and how to get rid of it ; and falls down at the Apostles' feet and says, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved ?"

The fear is not meant to last ; it is of no use in itself It is only an impelling motive that leads us to look to the Saviour, and the man that uses it so has used it rightly. Yet there comes in many a heart that transparent self-deception of delay. "They all with one accord began to make excuse." It is the history to-day as it was the history then. It is the history in such a congregation as this. There will be dozens, I was going to say hundreds, that will leave this chapel to night feeling that my poor word has gone a little way into their hardened hide ; but settling themselves back into their carelessness, and forgetting all impressions that have been made. O dear young friend, do not do that, I beseech you. Do not stifle the wholesome alarm, and cheat yourself with the notion of a little delay !

II.—And now, I wish next to pass very swiftly in review before you, some of the reasons why we fall into this habit of self-deceiving, indecision, and delay—"Go thy way," would be too sharp and unmistakable if it were left alone, so it is fined off : "I will not commit myself beyond to-day." "For this time go thy way, and when I have a convenient season I will call for thee."

What are the reasons for such an attitude as that ? Let me enumerate one or two of them as they strike me :— First, there is the instinctive, natural wish to get rid of a disagreeable subject,—much as a man without knowing what he is doing, twitches his hand away from the surgeon's lancet. So a great many of us do not like—and no wonder we do not like—these thoughts of the old Book about "righteousness, and temperance and judgment to come," and make a natural effort to get our minds away from the contemplation of the subject because it is painful and unpleasant. Do you think it would be a wise thing for a man, if he began to suspect that he was insolvent, to refuse to look into his books or to take stock, and let things drift, till there was not a halfpenny in the pound for anybody? What do you suppose his creditors would call him? They would not compliment him on either his honesty or his prudence, would they? And is it not the part of a wise man, if he begins to see that something is wrong, to get to the bottom of it, and as quickly as possible, to set it right? And what do you call people who, suspecting that there may be a great hole in the bottom of the ship, never man the pumps or do any caulking, but say, "Oh! she will very likely keep afloat until we get into harbour"?

Do not you think it would be a wiser thing for you if, *because* the subject is disagreeable, you would force yourself to think about it until it became agreeable to you? You can change it if you will, and make it not at all a shadow or a cloud, or a darkness over you. And you can scarcely expect to claim the designation of wise and prudent orderers of your lives until you do. Certainly it is not wise to shuffle a thing out of sight because it is not pleasing to think about.

Then there is another reason. A number of you young people say: "Go thy way for this time," because you have got a notion that it is time enough for you to begin to think about serious things and be religious when you get a bit older. And some of you even, I daresay, have an idea that religion is all very well for people that are turned sixty and are going down the hill, but that it is quite unnecessary for you. Shakespeare puts a grim word into the mouth of one of his characters, which sets the theory of many of us in its true light, when, describing a dying man calling on God, he makes the narrator say: "I, to comfort him, bid him he should not think of God. I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet."

Some of my hearers practically live on that principle, and are tempted to regard thoughts of God as in place only among medicine bottles, or when the shadows of the grave begin to fall cold and damp on our path. "Young men will be young men." "We must sow our wild oats." "You can't put old heads on young shoulders"—and such like sayings, often practically mean that vice and godlessness belong to youth, and virtue and religion to old age, just as flowers to spring and fruit to autumn. Let me beseech you not to be deceived by such a notion; and to search your own thoughts and see whether it be one of the reasons which leads you to say "Go thy way for this time."

Then again, some of us fall into this habit of putting off the decision for Christ, not consciously, not by any distinct act of saying—"No! I will not," but simply by letting the impressions made on our hearts and consciences be crowded out of them by cares and enjoyments and pleasures and duties of this world. If you had not so much to do at Owen's College, you would have time to think about religion. If you had not so many parties and balls to go to, you would have time to nourish and foster these impressions. If you had not your place to make in the warehouse, if you had not this, that, and the other thing to do; if you had not love, and pleasure, and ambition, and advancement, and mental culture to attend to, you would have time for religion; but as soon as the seed is sown and the sower's back turned, hovering flocks of light-winged thoughts and vanities pounce down upon it and carry it away seed by seed. And if some stray seed here and there remains and begins to sprout, the ill weeds which grow apace, spring up with ranker stems and choke it. "The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word," and efface the impression made upon your hearts.

Here to-night some serious thought is roused; by to-morrow at mid-day it has all gone. You did not intend it to go, you did not set yourself to banish it, you simply opened the door to the flocking in of the whole crowd of the world's cares and occupations, and away went the shy solitary thought that, if it had been cared for and tended, might have led you at last to the cross of Jesus Christ. Do not allow yourselves to be drifted by the swaying current of earthly cares from the impressions that are made upon your consciences, and from the duty that you know you ought to do!

And then some of you fall into this attitude of delay, and say to the messenger of God's love :—"Go thy way for this time," because you do not like to give up something that you know is inconsistent with His love and service. Felix would not part with Drusilla, nor disgorge the ill-gotten gain of his province. Felix therefore was obliged to put away from him the thoughts that looked in that direction. I wonder if there is any young man listening to me now who feels that if he lets my words carry him where they seek to carry him, he will have to give up "fleshly lusts which war against the soul." I wonder if there is any young woman listening to me now, who feels that if she lets my words carry her where they would carry her, she will have to live a different life from what she has been doing, to have more of a high and a noble aim in it, to live for something else than pleasure. I wonder if there are any of you who are saying, "I cannot give up that." My dear young friend! "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee! It is better for thee to enter into life blind than with both eyes to be cast into hell-fire."

Reasons for delay, then, are these: first, getting rid of an unpleasant subject; second, thinking that there is time enough; third, letting the world obliterate the impressions that have been made; and fourth, shrinking from the surrender of something that you know you will have to give up.

III.—And now let me very briefly, as my last point, put before you one or two of the reasons which I would fain might be conclusive with you for present decision to take Christ for your Saviour and your Master.

And I say, do not delay, but *now* choose Him for your Redeemer, your Friend, your Helper, your Commander, your All; because delay is really decision the wrong way. Do not delay, but take Jesus Christ as the Saviour of your sinful souls, and rest your hearts upon Him to-night before you sleep; because there is no real reason for delay. No season will be more convenient than the present season. Every time is the right time to do the right thing, every time is the right time to begin following Him. There is nothing to wait for. There is no reason at all except their own disinclination, why every man and woman in this place now should not now grasp the cross of Christ as their only hope for forgiveness and acceptance, and yield themselves to that Lord, to live in His service for ever. Let not this day pass without your giving yourselves to Jesus Christ, because every time that you have this message brought to you, and you refuse to accept it, or delay to accept it, you make yourselves less capable of receiving it another time.

If you take a bit of phosphorus and put it upon a slip of wood, and ignite the phosphorus, bright as the blaze is, there drops from it a white ash that coats the wood and makes it almost incombustible. And so when the flaming conviction, laid upon your hearts, has burnt itself out, it has coated the heart, and it will be very difficult to kindle the light there again. Felix said, "Go thy way, when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee." Yes! and he did send for him, and he talked with him often,—He repeated the conversation, but we do not know that he repeated the trembling. He often communed with Paul, but it was only once that he was alarmed You are less likely to be touched by the Gospel message, for every time that you have heard it and put it away. That is what makes my place here so terribly responsible, and makes me feel that my words are so very feeble in comparison with what they ought to be. I know that I may be doing harm to men just because they listen and are not persuaded, and so go away less and less likely to be touched.

Ah! dear friends, you will, perhaps, never again have as deep impressions as you have now; or at least, they are not to be reckoned upon as probable, for the tendency of all truth is to lose its power by repetition, and the tendency of all emotion which is not acted upon is to become fainter and fainter. And so I beseech you that now you would cherish any faint impression that is being made upon your hearts and consciences. Let it lead you to Christ; and take Him for your Lord and Saviour now.

I say to you: Do that now, because delay robs you of large blessing. You will never want Jesus Christ more than you do to-day. You need Him in your early hours. Why should it be that a portion of your lives should be left unfilled by that rich mercy? Why should you postpone possessing the purest joy, the highest blessing, the Divinest strength? Why should you put off welcoming your best Friend into your heart. Why should you?

I say to you again, take Christ for your Lord, because delay inevitably lays up for you bitter memories and involves dreadful losses. There are good Christian men and women, I have no doubt, in this world now, who would give all they have if they could blot out of the tablets of their memories some past hours of their lives, before they gave their hearts to Jesus Christ. I would have you ignorant of such transgression. Oh! young men and women! If you grow up into middle life not Christians, then should you ever become so, you will have habits to fight with, and remembrances that will smart and sting; and some of you, perhaps, remembrances that will pollute even though you are conscious that you are forgiven. It is a better thing not to know the depths of evil than to know them and to have been raised from them. You will escape infinite sorrows by an early cleaving to Christ your Lord.

And last of all, I say to you, give yourselves to night to Jesus Christ, because no to-morrow may be yours. Delay is gambling, very irrationally, with a very uncertain thing—your life and your future opportunities. "You know not what shall be on the morrow."

Six-and-twenty years I have preached in Manchester these annual sermons to the young. Ah! how many of those that heard the early ones are laid in their graves; and how many of them were laid in *early* graves; and how many of them said, as some of you are saying, "When I get older I will turn religious." And they never got older. It is a commonplace word that, but I leave it on your hearts. You have no time to lose.

Do not delay, because delay is decision in the wrong way; do not delay because there is no reason for delay; do not delay because delay robs you of a large blessing; do not delay because delay lays up for you, if ever you come back, bitter memories ; do not delay because delay may end in death. And for all these reasons come as a sinful soul to Christ the Saviour ; and ask Him to forgive you, and follow in His footsteps. And do it now ! "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts."

SALT WITHOUT SAVOUR.

SERMON XIV.

SALT WITHOUT SAVOUR.

"Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." Mat. v. 13.

THESE words must have seemed ridiculously presumptuous, when they were first spoken, and they have too often seemed mere mockery and irony in the ages since. A Galilean peasant, with a few of his rude countrymen who had gathered round him, stands up there on the mountain, and says to them, "You, a handful, are the people who are to keep the world from rotting, and to bring it all its best light." Strange when we think that Christ believed that these men were able to do these grand functions because they got their power from Himself! Stranger still to think that notwithstanding all the miserable inconsistencies of the professing Church ever since, yet, on the whole, the experience of history has verified these words! And although some wise men may curl their lips with a sneer as they say about us Christians "*Ye* are are the salt of the earth!" yet the most progressive, and the most enlightened, and the most moral portion of humanity has derived its impulse to progress, its enlightenment about the loftiest things, and the purest portion of its morality from the men who received their power to impart these from Jesus Christ.

And so, dear brethren, I have to say two or three things now, which I hope will be plain, and earnest and searching, about the function of the Christian Church, and of each individual member of it, as set forth in these words; about the solemn possibility that the qualification for that function may go away from a man; about the grave question as to whether such a loss can ever be repaired; and about the certain end of the saltless salt.

I.—First, then, as to the high task of Christ's disciples as here set forth.

"Ye are the salt of the earth!" The metaphor wants very little explanation, however much enforcement it may require. It involves two things; a grave judgment as to the actual state of society, and a lofty claim as to what Christ's followers are able to do to it.

A grave judgment as to the actual state of society. It is corrupt and tending to corruption. You do not salt a living thing. You salt a dead one that it may not be a rotting one. And, says Christ, by implication, what He says plainly more than once in other places:—"Human society, without My influence, is a carcase that is rotting away and disintegrating. And you, faithful handful, who have partially apprehended the meaning of My mission, and have caught something of the spirit of My life, you are to be rubbed into that rotting mass to sweeten it, to arrest decomposition, to stay corruption, to give flavour to its insipidity, and to save it from falling to pieces of its own wickedness. Ye are the *salt* of the earth."

Now, it is not merely because we are the bearers of a truth that will do all this that we are thus spoken of, but we Christian men are to do it by the influence of conduct and character.

There are two or three thoughts suggested by this metaphor. The chief one is that of our power, and therefore our obligation to arrest the corruption round us, by our own purity. The presence of a good man, according to the old superstition, prevented the possessed from playing their tricks. The presence of a good man hinders the devil from having elbow room to do his work. Do you and I exercise a repressive influence, (if we do not do anything better,) so that evil and low-toned life is ashamed to show itself in our presence and skulks back as do wrongdoers from the bull's-eye of a policeman's lantern. It is not a high function, but it is a very necessary one, and it is one that all Christian men and women ought to discharge,—rebuking and hindering the operation of corruption, even if they have not the power to breathe a better spirit into the dead mass.

But the example of Christian men is not only repressive. It ought to tempt forth all that is best and purest and highest in the people with whom they come in contact. Every man that does right helps to make public opinion in favour of doing right; and every man that lowers the standard of morality in his own life helps to lower it in the community of which he is a part. And so in a thousand ways that I have no time to dwell upon here, the men that have Christ in their hearts and something of Christ's conduct and character repeated in theirs are to be the preserving and purifying influence in the midst of this corrupt world.

There are two other points that I name, and do not enlarge upon. The first of them is—salt does its work by being brought into close contact with the thing which it is to work upon. And so we, brought into contact as we are with plenty of evil and wickedness by many common relations of friendship, of kindred, of business, of proximity, of citizenship, and the like,—we are not to seek to withdraw ourselves from contact with the evil. The only way by which the salt can purify is by being rubbed into the corrupted thing.

And once more, salt does its work silently, inconspicuously, gradually. "Ye are the light of the world," says Christ in the next verse. Light is far-reaching and brilliant, flashing that it may be seen. That is one side of Christian work, the side that most of us like best, the conspicuous kind of work. Ay! but there is a very much humbler, and, as I fancy, a very much more useful kind of work that we have all to do. We shall never be the "light of the world," except on condition of being "the salt of the earth." You have to do the humble, inconspicuous, silent work of checking corruption by a pure example before you can aspire to do the other work of raying out light into the darkness, and so drawing men to Christ Himself.

Now, brethren, why do I say all these common, threadbare platitudes, as I know they are? Simply in order to plant upon them this one question to the heart and conscience of you Christian men and women:—Is there anything in your life that makes this text, in its application to you, anything else than the bitterest mockery?

II.—The grave possibility of the salt losing its savour.

There is no need for asking the question whether that is a physical fact or not, whether in the natural realm it is possible for any forms of matter that have saline taste to lose it by any cause. That does not at all concern us. The point is that it is posssible for us, who call ourselves—and are—Christians to lose our penetrating pungency, which stays corruption; to lose all that distinguishes us from the men that we are to better.

Now I think that nobody can look upon the present condition of professing Christendom; or, in a narrower aspect, upon the present condition of English Christianity;

or in a still narrower, nobody can look round upon this congregation; or in the narrowest view, none of us can look into our own hearts—without feeling that this saying comes perilously near being true of us. And I beg you, dear Christian friends, while I try to dwell on this point to ask yourselves this question—Lord, is it I? and not to be thinking of other people whom you may suppose the cap will fit.

There is, then, manifest on every side—first of all the obliteration of the distinction between the salt and the mass into which is inserted, or to put it into other words, Christian men and women swallow down bodily, and practise thoroughly, the maxims of the world, as to life, and what is pleasant, and what is desirable, and as to the application of morality to business. There is not a hair of difference in that respect between hundreds and thousands of professing Christian men, and the irreligious man that has his office up the same staircase. I know, of course, that there are in every communion saintly men and women who are labouring to keep themselves unspotted from the world, but I know too that in every communion there are those, whose religion has next to no influence on their general conduct, and does not even keep them from corruption, to say nothing of making them sources of purifying influence. You cannot lay the flattering unction to your souls that the reason why there is so little difference between the Church and the world to-day is because the world has got so much better. I know that to a large extent the principles of Christian ethics have permeated the consciousness of a country like this, and have found their way even amongst people that make no profession of being Christians at all. Thank God for it; but that does not explain it all.

If you take a red-hot ball out of a furnace and lay it down upon a frosty moor, two processes will go on—the ball will lose its heat and the surrounding atmosphere will gain. There are two ways by which you equalise the temperature of a hotter and a colder body, the one is by the hot one getting cold, and the other is by the cold one getting hot. If you are not warming the world the world is freezing you. Every man influences all round about him, and receives influences from them, and if there be not more exports than imports, if there be not more influences and mightier influences raying out from him than coming into him, he is a poor creature, and at the mercy of circumstances. "Men must either be hammers or anvils;" —must either give blows or receive them. I am afraid that a great many of us who call ourselves Christians get a great deal more harm from the world than we ever dream of doing good to it. Remember this, "you are the salt of the earth," and if you do not salt the world, the world will rot you.

Is there any difference between your ideal of happiness and the irreligious one? Is these any difference between your notion of what is pleasure, and the irreligious one? Is there any difference in your application of the rules of morality to daily life, any difference in your general way of looking at things from the way of the ungodly world? Yes, or No? Is the salt being infected by the carcase, or is it purifying the corruption? Answer the question, brother, as before God and your own conscience.

Then there is another thing. There can be no doubt but that all round and shared by us, there are instances of the cooling of the fervour of Christian devotion. That is the reason for the small distinction in character and conduct between the world and the Church to day. An Arctic climate will not grow tropical fruits, and if the heat have been let down, as it has been let down, you cannot expect the glories of character and the pure unworldliness of conduct that you would have had at a higher temperature. Nor is there any doubt but that the present temperature is, with some of us, a distinct *loss* of heat. It was not always so low. The thermometer has gone down.

There are, no doubt, people listening to me who had once a far more vigorous Christian life than they have today; who were once far more aflame with the love of God than they are now. And although I know, of course, that as years go on emotion will become less vivid, and feeling may give place to principle, yet I know no reason why, as years go on, fervour should become less, or the warmth of our love to our Master should decline. There will be less sputtering and crackling when the fire burns up; there may be fewer flames; but there will be a hotter glow of ruddy unflaming heat. That is what ought to be in our Christian experience.

Nor can there be any doubt, I think, but that the obliteration of the distinction between us and the world, and the decay of the fervour of devotion which leads to it, are both to be traced to a yet deeper cause, and that is the loss or diminution of actual fellowship with Jesus Christ. It was that which made these men "salt." It was that, which made them "light." It is that, and that alone, which makes devotion burn fervid, and which makes characters glow with the strange saintliness that rebukes iniquity, and works for the purifying of the world.

And so I would remind you that fellowship with Jesus Christ is no vague exercise of the mind but is to be cultivated by three things, which I fear me are becoming less and less habitual amongst professing Christians:—Meditation, the study of the Bible, private prayer. If you have not these—and you know best whether you have them or not—no power in Heaven or earth can prevent you from losing the savour that makes you salt.

III.—Now, I come to the next step, and that is the solemn question, Is there a possibility of re-salting the saltless salt, of restoring the lost savour? "Wherewithal shall it be salted?" says the Master. That is plain enough, but do not let us push it too far. If the Church is meant for the purifying of the world and the Church itself needs purifying, is there anything in the world that will do it? If the army joins the rebels is there anything that will bring back the army to submission? Our Lord is speaking about ordinary means and agencies. He is saying in effect, if the one thing that is intended to preserve the meat loses its power, is there anything lying about that will salt that? So far, then, the answer seems to be—No!

But Christ has no intention that these words should be pushed to this extreme, that if salt loses its savour, if a man loses the pungency of his Christian life, he cannot get it back, by going again to the source from which he got it at first. There is no such implication in these last words. There is no obstacle in the way of a penitent returning to the fountain of all power and purity, nor of the full restoration of the lost savour, if a man will only bring about a full reunion of himself with the source of the savour.

Dear brethren! The message is to each of us; The same pleading words, which the Apocalyptic seer heard from Heaven, come to you and me: "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works." And all the savour and the sweetness that flow from fellowship with Jesus Christ will come back to us in larger measure than ever, if we will return unto the Lord. Repentance and returning will bring back the saltness to the salt, and the brilliancy to the light.

IV.—But one last word warns us what is the certain end of the saltless salt. As the other Evangelist puts it: "It is neither good for the land nor for the dunghill."

You cannot put it upon the soil; there is no fertilizing virtue in it. You cannot even fling it into the rubbish heap; it will do mischief there. Pitch it out into the road; it will stop a cranny somewhere between the stones when once it is well trodden down by men's heels. That is all it is fit for. God has no use for it, man has no use for it. If it has failed in doing the only thing it was created for, it has failed altogether. Like a knife that will not cut, or a lamp that will not burn, it may have a beautiful handle, a beautiful stem, it may be highly artistic and decorated;—does it cut, does it burn? If not, it is a failure altogether, and in this world there is no room for failures. The poorest living thing of the lowest type will jostle the dead thing out of the way. And so, for the salt that has lost its savour, there is only one thing to be done with it—cast it out, and tread it under foot.

Yes! Where are the Churches of Asia Minor, the patriarchates of Alexandria, of Antioch, of Constantinople; the whole of that early Syrian, Palestinian Christianity; where are they? Where is the Church of North Africa, the Church of Augustine? "Trodden under foot of men!" Over the archway of a mosque in Damascus you can read the half obliterated inscription:—"Thy Kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting Kingdom." And above it:—"There is no God but God, and Mohammed is His prophet!" The salt has lost his savour, and been cast out.

And does anybody believe that the Churches of Christendom are eternal in their present shape? I see everywhere the signs of disintegration in the existing embodiments and organisations that set forth Christian life. And I am sure of this, that in the days that are coming to us, the storm in which we are already caught, all dead branches will be whirled out of the tree. So much the better for the tree! And a great deal that calls itself organised Christianity will have to go down because there is not vitality enough in it to stand. For you know it is low vitality that catches all the diseases that are going; and it is out of the sick sheep's eyeholes that the ravens peck the eyes. And it will be the feeble types of spiritual life, the inconsistent Christianities of our churches, that will yield the crop of apostates and heretics and renegades, and that will fall before temptation.

Brethren, remember this: Unless you go back close to your Lord, you will go further away. The deadness will deepen, the coldness will become icier and icier; you will lose more and more of the life, and show less and less of the likeness, and purity, of Jesus Christ until you come to this—I pray God that none of us come to it—"Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." Dead!

My brother, let us return unto the Lord our God, and keep nearer Him than we ever have done, and bring our hearts more under the influence of His grace, and cultivate the habit of communion with Him; and pray and trust, and leave ourselves in His hands, that His power may come into us, and that we in the beauty of our characters, and the purity of our lives, and the elevation of our spirits, may witness to all men that we have been with Christ; and may, in some measure, check the corruption that is in the world through lust.

THE LAMP AND THE BUSHEL.

SERMON XV.

THE LAMP AND THE BUSHEL.

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under the bushel, but on the candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." Matt. v. 14, 15, 16.

THE conception of the office of Christ's disciples contained in these words is a still bolder one than that expressed by the preceding metaphor, which we considered last Sunday. "Ye are the salt of the earth" implied superior moral purity and power to arrest corruption. "Ye are the light of the world" implies superior spiritual illumination, and power to scatter ignorance.

That is not all the meaning of the words, but that is certainly in them. So then, our Lord here gives His solemn judgment that the world without Him and those who have learnt from Him, is in a state of darkness; and that His followers have that to impart which will bring certitude and clearness of knowledge, together with purity and joy and all the other blessed things which are "the fruit of the light."

That high claim is illustrated by a very homely metaphor. In every humble house from which His peasant-followers came, there would be a lamp—some earthen saucer with a little oil in it, in which a wick floated—a rude stand to put it upon; a meal-chest or a flour-bin; and a humble pallet on which to lie. These simple pieces of furniture are taken to point this solemn lesson. "When you light your lamp you put it on the stand, do you not? You light it in order that it may give light; you do not put it under the meal-measure nor the bed. So I have kindled you that you may shine, and put you where you are that you may give light."

And the same thought, with a slightly different turn in the application, lies in that other metaphor, which is inclosed in the middle of this parable about the light. "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid." Where they stood on the mountain, no doubt, they could see some village perched upon a ridge for safety, with its white walls gleaming in the strong Syrian sunlight; a landmark for many a mile round. So says Christ, "The City which I found, the true Jerusalem, like its prototype in the Psalm, is to be conspicuous for situation, that it may be the joy of the whole earth."

I have ventured to take all this somewhat long text this morning because all the parts of it hold so closely together, and converge upon the one solemn exhortation with which it closes, and which I desire to lay upon your hearts and consciences, "Let your light so shine before men." I make no pretensions to anything like an artificial arrangement of my remarks, but simply follow the words in the order in which they lie before us.

I.—First just a word about the great conception of a Christian man's office which is set forth in that metaphor: "Ye are the light of the world." That expression is wide, "generic," as they say. Then in the unfolding of this little parable our Lord goes on to explain what kind of a light it is to which He would compare His people—the light of a lamp kindled. Now that is the first point that I wish to deal with. Christian men individually, and the Christian Church as a whole, shine by derived light. There is but One that is light in Himself. He who said, "I am the light of the world, he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness," was comparing Himself to the sunshine, whereas when He said to us "Ye are the light of the world; men do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel," He was comparing us to the kindled light of the lamp, which had a beginning and will have an end.

Before, and independent of, His historical manifestation in the flesh, the Eternal Word of God, who from the beginning was the Life, was also the light of men; and all the light of reason and of conscience, all which guides and illumines, comes from that one source, the Everlasting Word, by whom all things came to be and consist. "He was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

And further, the historic Christ, the Incarnate Word, is the source for men of all true revelation of God and themselves, and of the relations between them; the Incarnate Ideal of humanity, the Perfect Pattern of conduct, who alone sheds beams of certainty on the darkness of life, who has left a long trail of light as He has passed into the dim regions beyond the grave. In both these senses He is the light, and we gather our radiance from Him.

We shall be "light" if we are "in the Lord." It is by union with Jesus Christ that we partake of His illumination. A sunbeam has no more power to shine if it be severed from the sun than a man has to give light in this dark world if He be parted from Jesus Christ. Cut the current and the electric light dies, slacken the engine and the electric arc becomes dim, quicken it and it burns bright. So the condition of my being light is my keeping unbroken my communication with Jesus Christ; and every variation in the extent to which I receive into my heart the influx of His power and of His love is correctly measured and represented by the greater or the lesser brilliancy of the light with which I reflect His beauty. "Ye were some time darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." Keep near to Him, and a firm hold of His hand, and then you will be light.

And now I need not dwell for more than a moment or two upon what I have already said is included in this conception of the Christian man as being light. There are two sides to it; one is that all Christian people who have learned to know Jesus Christ and have been truly taught of Him, do possess a certitude and clearness of knowledge which make them the lights of the world. We advance no claims to any illumination as to other than moral or religious truth. We leave all the other fields uncontested. We bow humbly with confessed ignorance and with unfeigned gratitude and admiration before those who have laboured in them as our teachers, but if we are true to our Master, and true to the position in which He has placed us, we shall not be ashamed to say that we believe ourselves to know the truth, in so far as men can ever know it, about the all-important subject of God and man, and the bond between them.

To-day there is need, I think, that Christian men and women should not be reasoned or sophisticated or cowed out of their confidence that they have the light because they do know God. It is proclaimed as the ultimate word of modern thought that we stand in the presence of a power which certainly is, but of which we can know nothing except that it is altogether different from ourselves, and that it ever tempts us to believe that we can know it, and ever repels us into despair. Our answer is "Yes! we could have told you that long ago, though not altogether in your sense; you have got hold of half a truth, and here is the whole of it:—No man hath seen God at any time, nor can see Him!" (a Gospel of despair, verified by the last words of modern thinkers), The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."—

Christian men and women! "Ye are the light of the world." Darkness in yourselves, ignorant about many things, ungifted with lofty talent, you have got hold of the deepest truth; do not be ashamed to stand up and say, even in the presence of Mars' Hill, with all its Stoics and Epicureans:—"Whom ye ignorantly"—alas! not worship —"Whom ye ignorantly speak of, Him declare we unto you."

And then there is the other side, which I only name, moral purity. Light is the emblem of purity as well as the emblem of knowledge, and if we are Christians we have within us, by virtue of our possession of an indwelling Christ, a power which teaches and enables us to practise a morality high above the theories and doings of the world. But upon this there is the less need to dwell, as it was involved in our consideration of the previous figure of the salt.

II.—And now the next point that I would make is this: following the words before us, the certainty that if we are light we shall shine. The nature and property of light is to radiate. It cannot choose but shine; and in like manner the little village perched upon a hill there, glittering and twinkling in the sunlight, cannot choose but be seen. So, says Christ, "If you have Christian character in you, if you have Me in you, such is the nature of the Christian life that it will certainly manifest itself." Let us dwell upon that for a moment or two. Take two thoughts: All earnest Christian conviction will demand expression; and all deep experience of the purifying power of Christ upon character will show itself in conduct.

All earnest conviction will demand expression. Everything that a man believes has a tendency to convert its believer into its apostle. That is not so in regard of common every-day truths, nor in regard even of truths of science, but in regard of all moral truth. For example, if a man gets a vivid and an intense conviction of the evils of intemperance and the blessings of abstinence, look what a fiery vehemence of propagandism is at once set to work! And so all round the horizon of moral truth which is intended to affect conduct. It is of such a sort that a man cannot get it into brain and heart without causing him before long to say—"This thing has mastered me, and turned me into its slave; and I must speak according to my convictions."

That experience works most mightily in regard of Christian truth, as the highest. What shall we say, then, of the condition of Christian men and women if they have not such an instinctive need of utterance? Do you ever feel this in your heart:—"Thy word shut up in my bones was like a fire. I was weary of forbearing, and I could not stay"? Professing Christians! do you know anything of the longing to speak your deepest convictions, the feeling that the fire within you is burning through all envelopings, and will be out?

What shall we say of the men that have it not? God forbid I should say there is no fire, but I do say that if the fountain never rises into the sunlight above the dead level of the pool there can be very little pressure at the main; that if a man has not the longing to speak his religious convictions those convictions must be very hesitating and very feeble; that if you never felt "I must say to somebody I have found the Messias," you have not found Him in any very deep sense, and that if the light that is in you can be buried under a bushel it is not much of a light after all, and needs a great deal of feeding and trimming before it can be what it ought to be.

On the other hand, all deep experience of the purifying power of Christ upon character will show itself in conduct. It is all very well for people to talk about having received the forgiveness of sins and the inner sanctification of God's Spirit. If you have, let us see it, and let us see it in the commonest, pettiest things of daily life. The communication between the inmost experience and the outermost conduct is such as that if there be any real revolution deep down, it will manifest itself in the daily life. I make all allowance for the loss of power in transmission, for the loss of power in friction. I am glad to believe that you and I, and all our imperfect brethren, are a great deal better in heart than we ever manage to show ourselves to be in life. Thank God for the consolation that may come out of that thought—but notwithstanding I come back to my point that making all such allowance, and setting up no impossible standard of absolute identity between duty and fact in this present life, yet, on the whole if we are Christian people with any deep central experience of the cleansing power and influence of Christ and His grace, we shall show it in life and in conduct. Or, to put it into the graphic and plain words of my text, If we are light we shall shine.

III.—Again, and very briefly, this obligation of giving light is still further enforced by the thought that that was Christ's very purpose in all that He has done with us and for us. The homely figure here implies that *He* has not kindled the lamp to put it under the bushel, but that *His* purpose in lighting it was that it might give light.

God has made us partakers of His grace, and has given it to us to be light in the Lord, for this among other purposes, that we should impart that light to others.

No creature is so small that it has not the right to expect that its happiness and welfare shall be regarded by God as an end in His dealings with it; but no creature is so great that it has the right to expect that its happiness or well-being shall be regarded by God and itself as God's only end in His dealings with it. He gives us His grace, His pardon, His love, the quickening of His Spirit by our union with Jesus Christ; He gives us our knowledge of Him, and our likeness to Him—what for? "For my own salvation, for my happiness and well being," you say. Certainly, blessed be His name for His love and goodness! But is that all His purpose? Paul did not think so when he said, "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined into our hearts (that we might give to others) the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." And Christ did not think so when He said "Men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but that it may give light to all that are in the house." "Heaven doth with us as we with torches do: not light them for themselves." The purpose of God is that we may shine. The lamp is kindled not to illumine itself, but that it may "give light to all that are in the house."

Consider again, that whilst all these things are true, there is yet a solemn possibility that men—even good men—may stifle and smother and shroud their light. You can, and I am afraid a very large number of you do, this; by two ways. You can bury the light of a holy character under a whole mountain of inconsistencies. If one were to be fanciful, one might say that the bushel or meal-chest meant material well-being, and the bed, indolence, and love of ease. I wonder how many Christian men and women in this place this morning have buried their light under the flour-bin and the bed, so interpreted. How many of us have drowned our consecration and devotion in foul waters of worldly lusts, and have let the love of earth's goods, of wealth and pleasure, and creature love, come like a poisonous atmosphere round the lamp of our Christian character, making it burn dim and blue.

And we can bury the light of the Word under cowardly and sheepish and indifferent silence. I wonder how many of us have done that. Like blue-ribbon men that button their great coats over their blue ribbons when they go into company where they are afraid to show them, there are plenty of Christian people that are devout Christians at the Communion Table that would be ashamed to say they were so in the miscellaneous company of a railway carriage or a *table d'hote.* There are professing Christians who have gone through life in their relationships to their fathers, sisters, wives, children, friends, kindred, their servants and dependants, and have never spoken a loving word for their Master. That is a sinful hiding your light under the bushel and the bed.

IV.—And so the last word, into which all this converges, is the plain duty: If you are light, shine! "Let your light so shine before men," says the text, "that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven."

In the next chapter our Lord says: "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them. Thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues that they may be seen of men." What is the difference between the two sets of men and the two kinds of conduct? The motive makes the difference for one thing, and for another thing: "Let your light so shine" does not mean "take precautions that your goodness may come out into public," but it means "Shine!" You find the light, and the world will find the eyes, no fear of that! You do not need to seek "to be seen of men," but you do need to shine that men may see.

The lighthouse keeper takes no pains that the ships tossing away out at sea may behold the beam that shines from his lamp, but all that he does is to feed it and tend it. And that is all that you and I have to do—tend the light, and do not, like cowards, cover it up. Modestly, but yet bravely, carry out your Christianity, and men will see it. Do not be as a dark lantern, burning with the slides down and illuminating nothing and nobody. Live your Christianity, and it will be beheld.

And remember, candles are not lit to be looked at. Candles are lit that something else may be seen by them. Men may see God through your words, through your conduct, that never would have beheld Him otherwise, because His beams are too bright for their dim eyes. And it is an awful thing to think that the world always—*always*—takes its conception of Christianity from the Church, and neither from the Bible nor from Christ ; and that it is you and your like, you inconsistent Christians ; you people that say your sins are forgiven and are doing the old sins day by day which you say are pardoned ; you low-toned, unpraying, worldly Christian men, who have no elevation of character and no self-restraint of life and no purity of conduct above the men in your own profession and in your own circumstances all round you—it is you that are hindering the coming of Christ's Kingdom, it is you that are the standing disgraces of the Church, and the weaknesses and diseases of Christendom. I speak strongly, not half as strongly as the facts of the case would warrant ; but I lay it upon all your consciences as professing Christian people to see to it that no longer your frivolities, or doubtful commercial practices, nor low, unspiritual tone of life, your self-indulgence in household arrangements, and a dozen other things that I might name—that no longer do they mar the clearness of your testimony for your Master, and disturb with envious streaks of darkness the light that shines from His followers.

How effectual such a witness may be none who have not seen its power can suppose. Example does tell. A holy life curbs evil, ashamed to show itself in that pure presence. A good man or woman reveals the ugliness of evil by shewing the beauty of holiness. More converts would be made by a Christ-like Church than by many sermons. Oh! if you professing Christians knew your power and would use it, if you would come closer to Christ, and catch more of the light from His face, you might walk among men like very angels, and at your bright presence darkness would flee away, ignorance would grow wise, impurity be abashed and sorrow comforted.

Be not content, I pray you, till your own hearts are fully illumined by Christ, having no part dark—and then live as remembering that you have been made light that you may shine. "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!"

MAN'S TRUE TREASURE IN GOD.

SERMON XVI.

MAN'S TRUE TREASURE IN GOD.

"The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup; Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." Psalm xvi. 5, 6.

WE read, in the law which created the priesthood in Israel, that "the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them. I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel." (Num. xvii. 20.) Now there is an evident allusion to that remarkable provision in this text. The Psalmist feels that in the deepest sense he has no possession amongst the men who have only possessions upon earth, but that God is the treasure which he grasps in a rapture of devotion and self-abandonment. The priest's duty is his choice. He will "walk by faith and not by sight."

Are not all Christians priests? and is not the very essence and innermost secret of the religious life this,—that the heart turns away from earthly things and deliberately accepts God as its supreme good, and its only portion?

These first words of my text contain the essence of all true religion.

The connexion between the first clause and the others is closer than many readers perceive. The "lot" which "Thou maintainest," the "pleasant places," the "goodly heritage," all carry on the metaphor, and all refer to God as Himself the portion of the heart that chooses and trusts Him. "Thou maintainest my lot." He Who is our inheritance also guards our inheritance, and whosoever has taken God for his possession has a possession as sure as God can make it. "The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." The heritage that is goodly is God Himself. When a man chooses God for his portion, then, and then only is he satisfied;—"satisfied with favour, and full of the goodness of the Lord." Let me try and expand and enforce those thoughts, with the hope that we may catch something of their fervour and their glow.

I.—The first thought, then, that comes out of the words before us is this:—all true religion has its very heart in deliberately choosing God as my supreme good.

"The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup." The two words which are translated in our version "portion" and "inheritance" are substantially synonymous The latter of them is used continually in reference to the share of each individual, or family, or tribe in the partition of the land of Canaan. There is a distinct allusion, therefore, to that partition in the language of our text; and the two expressions, part or "portion," and "inheritance," are substantially identical, and really mean just the same as if the single expression had stood:—"The Lord is my portion."

I may just notice in passing that these words are evidently alluded to in the New Testament, in the Epistle to the Colossians, where Paul speaks of God "having made us meet for the portion of the inheritance of the saints in light."

And then the "portion of my cup" is a somewhat strange expression. It is found in one of the other Psalms, with the meaning "fortune," or "destiny," or "sum of circumstances which make up a man's life." There may be, of course, an allusion to the metaphor of a feast here, and God may be set forth as "the portion of my cup," in the sense of being the refreshment and sustenance of a man's soul. But I should rather be disposed to consider that there is merely a prolongation of the earlier metaphor, and that the same thought as is contained in the figure of the "inheritance" is expressed here, (as in common conversation it is often expressed) by the word "cup,"—namely, that which makes up a man's portion in this life." It is used with such a meaning in the well-known words: "My cup runneth over," and in another shape in, "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" It is the sum of circumstances which make up a man's "fortune." So the double metaphor presents the one thought of God as the true possession of the devout soul.

Now how do we possess God? We possess things in one fashion and persons in another. The lowest and most imperfect form of possession is that by which a man simply keeps other people off material good, and asserts the right of disposal of it as he thinks proper. A blind man may have the finest picture that ever was painted; he may call it his, that is to say, nobody else can sell it, but what good is it to him? A lunatic may own a library as big as the Bodleian, but what use is it to him? Does the man who draws the rents of a mountain-side, or the poet or painter, to whom its cliffs and heather speak far-reaching thoughts, most truly possess it? The highest form of possession, even of things, is when they minister to our thought, to our emotion, to our moral and intellectual growth. We possess even them really, according as we know them and hold communion with them.

But when we get up into the region of persons, we possess them in the measure in which we understand them, and sympathise with them, and love them. Knowledge, intercourse, sympathy, affection; these are the ways by which men can possess men, and spirits, spirits. A man that gets the thoughts of a great teacher into his mind, and has his whole being saturated by them, may be said to have made the teacher his own. A friend or a lover owns the heart that he or she loves, and which loves back again; and not otherwise do we possess God.

Such ownership must be, from its very nature, reciprocal. There must be the two sides to it. And so we read in the Bible, with equal frequency: the Lord is the "inheritance of His people," and His people are "the inheritance of the Lord." He possesses me, and I possess Him—with reverence be it spoken—by the very same tenure; for whoso loves God has Him, and whom He loves He owns. There is deep and blessed mystery involved in this wonderful prerogative, that the loving believing heart has God for its possession and indwelling Guest; and people are apt to brush such thoughts aside as mystical. But like all true Christian mysticism, it is intensely practical.

We have God for ours first in the measure in which our minds are actively occupied with thoughts of Him. We have no merely mystical or emotional possession of God to preach. There is a real, adequate knowledge of Him in Jesus Christ. We know God, His character, His heart, His relations to us, His thoughts of good concerning us, sufficiently for all intellectual and for all practical purposes. I wish to ask you a plain question. Do you ever think about Him?

There is only one way of getting God for yours, and that is by bringing Him into your life by frequent meditation upon His sweetness, and upon the truths that you know about Him. There is no other way by which a spirit can possess a spirit, that is not cognisable by sense, except only by the way of thinking about Him, to begin with. All else follows that. That is how you hold your dear ones when they go to the other side of the world. That is how you hold God Who dwells on the other side of the stars. There is no way to "have" Him, but through the understanding accepting Him, and keeping firm hold of Him. Men and women that from Monday morning to Saturday night never think of His name; how do they possess God? And professing Christians that never remember Him all the day long—what absurd hypocrisy it is for them to say that God is theirs!

Yours, and never in your mind! When your husband, or your wife, or your child, goes away from home for a week, do you forget them, as utterly as you forget God? Do you have them in any sense if they never dwell in the "study of your imagination," and never fill your thoughts with sweetness and with light?

And so again when the heart turns to Him, and when all the faculties of our being, will, and hope, and imagination, and all our affections and all our practical powers, when they all touch Him, each in its proper fashion, then and then only can we in any reasonable and true sense be said to possess God.

Thought, communion, sympathy, affection, moral likeness, practical obedience, these are the way—and not by mystical raptures only—by which, in simple prose fact, is it possible for the finite to grasp the infinite; and for a man to be the *owner* of God.

Now there is another consideration very necessary to be remembered, and that is that this possession of God involves, and is possible only by, a deliberate act of renunciation. The Levite's example, that is glanced at in my text, is always our law. You must have no part or inheritance amongst the sons of earth if God is to be your inheritance. Or, to put it into plain words, there must be a giving up of the material and the created if there is to be a possession of the Divine and the Heavenly. There cannot be *two* supreme, any more than there can be two pole-stars, one in the north, and the other in the south to both of which a man can be steering.

You cannot stand with—

> "One foot on land, and one on sea,
> To one thing constant never."

If you are going to have God as your supreme good you must empty your heart of earth and worldly things, or your possession of Him will be all words, and imagination, and hypocrisy. Brethren! I wish to bring that message to your consciences to-day.

And what is this renunciation? There must be, first of all, a fixed, deliberate, intelligent conviction lying at the foundation of my life that God is best, and that He and He only is my true delight and desire. Then there must be built upon that intelligent conviction that God is best, the deliberate turning away of the heart from these material treasures. Then there must be the willingness to abandon the outward possession of them, if they come in between us and Him. Just as travellers in old days, that went out looking for treasures in the western hemisphere, were glad to empty out their ships of their less precious cargo in order to load them with gold, you must get rid of the trifles, and fling these away if ever they so take up your heart that God has no room there. Or, rather, perhaps, if the love of God in any real measure, howsoever imperfectly, once gets into a man's soul, it will work there to expel and edge out the love and regard for earthly things.

Just as when the chemist collects oxygen in a vessel filled with water, as it passes into the jar it drives out the water before it; the love of God, if it come into a man's heart in any real sense, in the measure in which it comes, will deliver him from the love of the world.

But between the two there is warfare so internecine and endless that they cannot co-exist: and here, to-day, it is as true as ever it was that if you want to have God for your portion and your inheritance you must be content tc have no inheritance amongst your brethren, nor part amongst the sons of earth.

Men and women! Are you ready for that renunciation! are you prepared to say, "I know that the sweetness of Thy presence is the truest sweetness that I can taste; and lo! I give up all besides and my own self—

"O God of good, the unfathomed sea,
Who would not yield himself to Thee?"

And remember, that nothing less than these are Christianity—the conviction that the world is second and not first; that God is best, love is best, truth is best; knowledge of Him is best; likeness to Him is best; the willingness to surrender all if it come in contest with His supreme sweetness. He that turns his back upon earth by reason of the drawing power of the glory that excelleth, is a Christian. The Christianity that only trusts to Christ for deliverance from the punishment of sin, and so makes religion a kind of fire insurance, is a very poor affair. We need the lesson pealed into our ears as much as any generation has ever done, Ye cannot serve God and mammon. A man's real working religion consists in his loving God most and counting His love the sweetest of all things.

II.—Now let me turn to the next point that is here, viz., that this possession is as sure as God can make it. "Thou maintainest my lot." Thou art Thyself both my heritage, and the guardian of my heritage. He that possesses

God, says the text, therefore, by implication, is lifted above all fear and chance of change.

The land, the partition of which amongst the tribes lies at the bottom of the allusive metaphor of my text, was given to them under the sanction of a supernatural defence; and the law of their continuance in it was that they should trust and serve the unseen King. It was He, according to the theocratic theory of the Old Testament, and not chariots and horses, their own arm and their own sword, that kept them safe, though the enemies on the north and the enemies on the south were big enough to swallow up the little kingdom at a mouthful.

And so, says the Psalmist allusively, in a similar manner, the Divine Power surrounds the man who chooses God for his heritage, and nothing shall take that heritage from him.

The lower forms of possession, by which men are called the owners of material goods are imperfect, because they are all precarious and temporary. Nothing really belongs to a man if it can be taken from him. What we may lose we can scarcely be said to have. They *are* mine, they *were* yours, they *will be* somebody's else to-morrow. Whilst we have them we do not have them in any deep sense; we cannot retain them, they are not really ours at all. The only thing that is worth calling mine is something that so passes into and saturates the very substance of my soul; that, like a piece of cloth dyed in the grain, as long as two threads hold together the tint will be there. That is how God gives us Himself, and nothing can take Him out of a man's soul. He, in the sweetness of His grace, bestows Himself upon man, and guards His own gift, in the heart, which is Himself. He who dwells in God and God in him lives as in the inmost keep and citadel. The noise of battle may roar around the walls, but deep silence and peace are within. The storm may rage upon the coasts, but he who has God for his portion dwells in a quiet inland valley where the tempests never come. No outer changes can touch our possession of God. They belong to another region altogether. Other goods may go, but this is held by a different tenure. The life of a Christian is lived in two regions; in the one his life has its roots, and its branches extend to the other. In the one there may be whirling storms and branches may toss and snap, whilst in the other to which the roots go down, may be peace. Root yourselves in God, making Him your truest treasure, and nothing can rob you of your wealth.

We here in this commercial community see plenty of examples of great fortunes and great businesses melting away like yesterday's snow. And surely the difficulties and perplexities in which much of our Lancashire trade is involved to-day might preach to some of you this lesson: Set not your hearts on that which can pass, but make your treasure that which no man can take from you.

Then, too, there is the other thought. He will help us so that no temptations shall have power to make us rob *ourselves* of our treasure. None can take it from us but ourselves, but we are so weak and surrounded by temptations so strong that we need Him to aid us if we are not to be beguiled by our own treacherous hearts into parting with our highest good. A handful of feeble Jews were nothing against the gigantic might of Assyria, or against the compacted strength of civilised Egypt, but there they stood, on their rocky mountains, defended, not by their own strength but by the might of a present God. And so, unfit to cope with the temptations round us as we are, if we cast ourselves upon His power and make Him our supreme delight, nothing shall be able to rob us of that possession and that sweetness.

And there is just one last point that I would refer to here on this matter of our stable possession of God. It is very beautiful to observe that this Psalm, which, in the language of my text, rises to the very height of spiritual, and, in a good sense, mystical devotion, recognising God as the One good for souls, is also one of the Psalms which has the clearest utterance of the faith in immortality. Just after the words of my text we read these others, in which the Old Testament confidence in a life beyond the grave reaches its very climax: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine holy one to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

That connection teaches us that the measure in which a man feels his true possession of God here and now, is the measure in which his faith rises triumphant over the darkness of the grave, and grasps, with unfaltering confidence, the conviction of an immortal life. The more we know that God is our portion and our treasure, the more sure, and calmly sure, we shall be that a thing like death cannot touch a thing like that, that the mere physical fact is far too small and insignificant a fact to have any power in such a region as that; that death can no more affect a man's relation to God, Whom he has learned to love and trust, than you can cut thought or feeling with a knife. The two belong to two different regions. Thus we have here the Old Testament faith in immortality shaping itself out of the Old Testament enjoyment of communion with God, with a present God. And you will find the very same process of thought in that seventy-third Psalm, which stands in some respects side by side with this one as containing the height of mystical devotion, joined with a very clear utterance of the faith in immortality:—"Whom have I in Heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee! Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."

So Death himself cannot touch the heritage of the man whose heritage is the Lord. And his ministry is not to rob us of our treasures as he robs men of all treasures besides (for "their glory shall not descend after them"), but to give us instead of the "earnest of the inheritance,"—the bit of turf by which we take possession of the estate—the broad land in all the amplitude of its sweep, into our perpetual possession. "Thou maintainest my lot." Neither death nor life shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

III.—And then the last thought here is that he who thus elects to find his treasure and delight in God is satisfied with his choice. "The lines"—the measuring cord by which the estate was parted off and determined—"are fallen, in pleasant places; yea!"—not as our Bible has it, merely "I have a *goodly* heritage," putting emphasis on the fact of possession, but—"the heritage is goodly *to me*," putting emphasis on the fact of subjective satisfaction with it.

I have no time to dwell upon the thoughts that spring from these words. Take them in the barest outline. No man that makes the worse choice of earth instead of God, ever, in the retrospect, said:—"I have a goodly heritage." One of the later Roman Emperors, who was one of the best of them, said, when he was dying:—"I have been everything, and it profits me nothing." No creature can satisfy your whole nature. Portions of it may be fed with their appropriate satisfaction, but as long as we feed on the things of earth there will always be part of our being like an unfed tiger in a menagerie, growling for its prey, whilst its fellows are satisfied for the moment. You can no more give your heart rest and blessedness by pitching worldly things into it than they could fill up

Chat Moss, when they made the first Liverpool and Manchester Railway, by throwing in cartloads of earth. The bog swallowed them and was none the nearer being filled.

No man that takes the world for his portion ever said, "The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places." For the make of your soul as plainly cries out "God!" as a fish's fins declare that the sea is its element, or a bird's wings mark it out as meant to soar. Man and God fit each other like the two halves of a tally. You will never get rest nor satisfaction, and you will never be able to look at the past with thankfulness, nor at the present with repose; nor into the future with hope, unless you can say, "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." But oh! if you do, then you have a goodly heritage, a heritage of still satisfaction, a heritage which suits, and gratifies, and expands all the powers of a man's nature, and makes him ever capable of larger and larger possessions of a God Who ever gives more than we can receive, that the overplus may draw us to further desire, and the further desire may more fully be satisfied.

The one, true, pure, abiding joy is to hold fellowship with God and to live in His love. The secret of all our unrest is the going out of our desires after earthly things. They fly forth from our hearts like Noah's raven, and nowhere amid all the weltering flood can find a resting-place. The secret of satisfied repose is to set our affections thoroughly on God. Then our wearied hearts, like Noah's dove returning to its rest, will fold their wings and nestle fast by the throne of God. "All the happiness of this life," said William Law, "is but trying to quench thirst out of golden *empty* cups." But if we will take the Lord for "the portion of our cup," we shall never thirst.

Let me beseech you to choose God in Christ for your supreme good and highest portion; and having chosen, to cleave to your choice. So shall you enter on possession of good that truly shall be yours, even "that good part, which shall not be taken away from you."

And, lastly, remember that if you would have God, you must take Christ. He is the true Joshua, who puts us in possession of the inheritance. He brings God to you—to your knowledge, to your love, to your will. He brings you to God, making it possible for your poor sinful souls to enter His presence by His blood; and for your spirits to possess that Divine Guest. "He that hath the Son, hath the Father"; and if you trust your souls to Him that died for you, and cling to Him as your delight and your joy, you will find that both the Father and the Son come to you and make Their home in you. Through Christ the Son, you will receive power to become sons of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, because joint heirs with Christ.

GOD'S TRUE TREASURE IN MAN.

SERMON XVII.

GOD'S TRUE TREASURE IN MAN.

"The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance." Deut. xxxii. 9.
"Jesus Christ (Who) gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people." Titus ii. 14.

In my last sermon I dealt with the thought that man's true treasure is in God. My text then, was: "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance; Thou maintainest my lot," and the following words. You observe the correspondence between these words and those of my first text: "The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance." The correspondence in the original is not quite so marked as it is in our Authorised Version, but still the idea in the two passages is the same.

You may remember that I said then that persons could possess persons only by love, sympathy, and communion. From that it follows that the possession must be mutual; or in other words, that only he can say: "Thou art mine," who can say, "I am thine." And so to possess God and to be possessed by God are but two ways of putting the same fact. "The Lord is the portion of His people," and "The Lord's portion is His people," are the same truth in a double form.

Then my second text clearly quotes the well-known utterance that lies at the foundation of the national life of Israel: "Ye shall be unto me a peculiar treasure above all people," and claims that privilege, like all Israel's privileges, for the Christian Church. In like manner Peter (1, ii. 9) quotes the same words "a peculiar people," as properly applying to Christians. I need scarcely remind you that "peculiar" here is used in its proper original sense of "belonging to," or, as the Revised Version gives it, "a people for God's own possession," and has no trace of the modern signification of "singular." Similarly we find Paul in His Epistle to the Ephesians giving both sides of the idea of the inheritance, in intentional juxtaposition, when he speaks (i. 14) of the "earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of God's own possession." In the words before us we have the same idea; and this text tells us besides how Christ, the revealer of God, wins men for Himself, and what manner of men they must be whom He counts as His.

Therefore there are, as I take it, three things to be spoken about now. First, God has a special ownership in some people. Second, God owns these people because He has given Himself to them. Third, God possesses, and is posssessed by, His inheritance, that He may give and receive services of love. Or, in briefer words, I have to speak about this wonderful thought of a special Divine ownership, what it rests upon, and what it involves.

Now, first, "the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance." Put side by side with that other words of the Old Testament: "All souls are Mine," or the utterance of the Hundredth Psalm rightly translated:—"It is He that hath made us, and to Him we belong." There is a right of ownership and possession inherent in the very relation of Creator and creature, so as that the Being made is wholly and altogether at the disposal, and is the property of Him that makes him.

But is that enough for God's heart? Is that worth calling ownership at all? An arbitrary tyrant in an unconstitutional kingdom, or a slave-owner, may have the most absolute right of property over his subject or his slave; may have the right of entire disposal of all his industry, of the profit of all his labour, may be able to do anything he likes with him, may have the power of life and death; but such ownership is only of the husk and case of a man. The man himself may be free, and may smile at the claim of possession. "They may *own* the body, and after that they have no more that they can do." That kind of authority and ownership, absolute and utter, to the point of death, may satisfy a tyrant or a slave-driver: it does not satisfy the loving heart of God. It is not real possession at all. In what sense did Nero own Paul when he shut him up in prison, and cut his head off? Does the slave-owner own the man that he whips within an inch of his life, and who dare not do anything without his permission? Does God in any sense that corresponds with the yearning of infinite love, own the men that reluctantly obey Him, and are simply, as it were, tools in His hands? He covets and longs for a deeper relationship and tenderer ties, and though all creatures are His, and all men are His servants and His possession, yet, like certain regiments in our own British army, there are some who have the right to bear in a special manner on their uniform and on their banners the emblazonment, "The King's Own." "The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance."

Well then, the next thought is that the special relationship of possession is constituted by mutual love. I said at the beginning of these remarks that the only ways by which spiritual beings can possess each other are by love, sympathy, and communion, and that these must necessarily be mutual. We have a perfect right to apply the human analogy here; in fact we are bound to do it if we would rightly understand such words as those of my text; and it just leads us to this, that the one thing whereby God reckons that He possesses a man at all is by His love falling upon that man's heart and soaking into it; and by the springing up in the heart of a corresponding affection. The men who welcome the Divine love that goes through the whole world, "seeking such to worship it," and to trust it, and to be its treasure and who therefore, lovingly yield to the loving Divine will, and take it for their law; —these are the men whom He regards as His portion and the lot of His inheritance. So "God is mine," "I am God's," are two sides of one truth; "I possess Him" and "I am possessed by Him" are but the statement of one fact expressed from two points of view. In the one case you look upon it from above, in the other case you look upon it from beneath. All the sweet commerce of mutual surrender and possession which makes the joy of our hearts, in friendship and in domestic life, we have the right to lift up into this loftier region, and find in it the best teaching of what makes the special bond of mutual possession between God and man.

Deep words of Scripture point in that direction. Those parables of our Lord's,—the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, in their infinite beauty, whilst they contain a great deal besides this, do contain this in their several ways. The money, the animal, the man, belong to the woman of the house, to the shepherd, to the father. Each is lost in a different fashion, but the most clear revelation is given in the last parable of the three, which explains the other two. The son was "lost" when he did not love the father, and he was "found" by the father when he returned the yearning of the father's heart.

And so, dear brethren, it ever is; the one thing that knits men to God is that the silken bond of love let down from the Heaven should by our own hand be-wrapped round our own hearts, and then we are united to Him. We are His and He is ours by the same double action; His love manifested by Him and His love received by us.

Now there is nothing in all that of favouritism. The declaration that there are people who have a special relationship to the Divine heart may be so stated as to have a very ugly look, and it often has been so stated as to be nothing more than self-complacent Pharisaism, which values a privilege principally because its possession is an insult to somebody else who has not it.

There has been plenty of Christianity of that sort in the world, but rightly looked at there is nothing of it in the thoughts of these texts. There is only this: it cannot but be that men who yield to God and love Him, and try to live near Him and do righteousness, are His, in a manner that those, who steel themselves against Him and turn away from Him, are not. It should be joy to believe that whilst all creatures have a place in His heart, and all His creatures are flooded with His benefits, and get as much of Him, as ever they can hold, the men who recognise the source of their blessing, and turn to it with grateful hearts, are nearer Him than those that do not do so. Let us take care, lest for the sake of seeming to preserve the impartiality of His love, we have destroyed all in Him that makes His love worth having. If to Him the good and the bad, the men that fear Him and the men that fear Him not, are equally satisfactory and in the same manner the objects of an equal love, then He is not a God that has pleasure in righteousness; and if He is not a God that has pleasure in righteousness, He is not a God for me to trust to. We are not giving countenance to the notion that God has any step-children, any petted members of His family, when we cleave to this truth that they that have welcomed His love into their hearts are dearer to Him than those that have closed the door against it.

And there is one more point here about this matter of ownership on which I dwell for a moment, namely, that this conception of certain men being in a special sense God's possession and inheritance means also that He has a special delight in, and lofty appreciation of them.

All this material creation exists for the sake of growing good men and women. That is the use of the things that are seen and temporal; they are like greenhouses built for the Great Gardener's use in striking and furthering the growth of His plants; and when He has got the plants He has got what He wanted, and you may pull the greenhouse down if you choose. So God estimates, and teaches us to estimate, the relative value and greatness of the material and the spiritual in this fashion, that He tells us in effect that all these magnificences and magnitudes round us are small and vulgar as compared with this—a heart in which wisdom and Divine truth and the love and likeness of God have attained to some tolerable measure of maturity and of strength. "These are His jewels," as the Roman matron said about her two boys. The Great Father looks upon the men that love Him as His jewels; and having got the jewels, the rock in which they were imbedded and preserved may be crushed when you like. "They shall be Mine," said the Lord, "My treasures, in that day which I make."

And so, my brother, all the insignificance of man, as compared with the magnitude and duration of the universe, need not stagger our faith that the divinest thing in the universe is a heart that has learnt to love God and aspire after Him; and should but increase our wonder and our gratitude, for that Christ who has been "mindful of man, and has visited the son of man," in order that He might give Himself for men, and so might win men for Himself.

II.—That brings me, and very briefly, to the other points that I desire to deal with this morning. The second one which is suggested to us from my second text in the Epistle to Titus is that God owns men because God has given Himself to man.

The Apostle puts it very strongly in the Epistle to Titus: "The glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for us"—"that He might purify unto Himself a *people for a possession.*"

Israel, according to one metaphor, was God's son, begotten by that great redeeming act of deliverance from the captivity of Egypt. (Deut. xxxii. 6-19.) According to another metaphor, Israel was God's bride, wooed and won for His own by that same act. Both of which just point to the thought that in order to get man for His own He has to give Himself to man. The very height and sublimity of that truth is found in the Christian fact which the Apostle points to here. We need not depart from human analogies here either. Christ gave Himself to us that He might get us for Himself. Absolute possession of others is only possible at the price of absolute surrender to them. No human heart ever gave itself away unless it was convinced that the heart to which it gave itself had given itself to it.

On the lower levels of human experience the only thing that binds one man to another in utter submission is the conviction that that other has given himself in absolute sacrifice for him. A doctor goes into the wards of an hospital with his life in his hands, and because he does he wins the respect, confidence, and affection of all that are there. You cannot buy a heart with anything less than a heart. In the barter of the world it is not skin for skin, but it is self for self. If you want to own me, you must give yourself altogether to me; and the measure in which teachers, and guides, and preachers and philanthropists of all sorts make conquests of men is the measure in which they make themselves sacrifices for men.

All that is true, and is lifted to its superlative truth, in the great central fact of the Christian faith. But there is more than human analogy here. Christ is not only self-sacrifice in the sense of surrender, but He is sacrifice in the sense of giving Himself for our propitiation and forgiveness. He has not only given Himself to us, He has given Himself for us. And there, and on that, is builded, and on that alone has He a right to build, or have we a right to yield, His claim of absolute authority over each of us.

He has died for us, therefore the springs of our life are at His disposal; and the strongest motives which can sway our wills are set in motion by His touch. His death, says this text, redeems us from iniquity and purifies us. That points to its power in delivering us from the service and practice of sin. He buys us from the despot whose slaves we were, and makes us His own in the hatred of evil and the doing of righteousness. Moved by His death, we become capable of heroisms and martyrdoms of devotion to Him. Brethren! It is only as that self-sacrificing love touches us, which died for our sins upon the Cross, that the diabolical chain of selfishness shall be broken from our affections and our wills, and we shall be led "into a large place" of glad surrender of ourselves to the sweetness and the gentle authority of His omnipotent love.

III.—The last thought which I suggest is the issues to which the mutual possession points. God owns men, and is owned by them, in order that there may be a giving and receiving of mutual services of love.

"The Lord's portion is His people." That in the Old Testament is always laid as the foundation of certain obligations under which He has come, and which He will abundantly discharge. What is a great landlord expected to do to his estate? "What ought I to have done to my vineyard?" the Divine Proprietor asks through the mouth of His servant the prophet. He ought to till it, He ought not to starve it; He ought to fence it; He ought to cast a wall about it; He ought to reap the fruits. And He does all that for His inheritance. God's honour is concerned in His portion not being waste. It is not to be a garden of the sluggard, by which people who pass can see the thorns growing there. So He will till it, He will plough it, He will pick out the weeds; and all the discipline of life will come to us; and the ploughshare will be driven deep into the heart that "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" may spring up. He will fence His vineyard. Round about His inheritance His hand will be cast; within His people His spirit will dwell. No harm shall come near thee if thy love is given to Him. Safe and untouched by evil, thou shalt walk if thou walk with God. "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of Mine eye." The soul that trusts Him He accepts in pledge, and before any evil can befall it He must be overcome by a stronger than He, who can take away from Him His goods, "He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." "The Lord's portion is His people;" and "none shall pluck them out of His hand."

And on the other side, What do we owe to God, as belonging to Him? What does the vineyard owe the husbandman? Fruit. We are His, therefore we are bound to absolute submission. "Ye are not your own." Life, circumstances, occupations, all; we hold them at His will. We have no more right of property in anything than a slave in the bad old days had in his cabin and patch of ground. They belonged to the master to whom he belonged. Let us recognise our stewardship, and be glad to know ourselves His, and all events and things which we sometimes think ours, to be His also.

We are His, therefore we owe absolute trust. The slave has at least this blessing in his lot, that he need have no anxieties. Nor need we. We belong to God, and He will take care of us. A rich man's horses and dogs are well cared for, and our Owner will not leave us unheeded. Our well-being involves His good name. Leave anxious thought to masterless hearts which have to front the world with nobody at their backs. If you are God's you will be looked after.

We are His, therefore we are bound to live to His praise. That is the conclusion which one Old Testament passage draws. "This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise." (Isaiah xliii. 21.) The Apostle Peter quotes these words immediately after those from Exodus, which describe Israel as "a people for God's own possession"—"that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you." Let us then live to His glory, and remember that the servants of the king are bound to stand to their colours amid rebels, and that they who know the sweetness of possessing God and the blessedness of yielding to His supreme control should tell what they have found of His goodness, and "show forth the honour of His name, and make His praise glorious." Let not all the magnificent and wonderful expenditure of Divine longing and love be in vain, nor run off your hearts like water poured upon a rock. Surely the Sun's flames leaping leagues high, they tell us, in tongues of burning gas, must melt everything that is near them. Shall we keep our hearts sullen and cold before such a fire of love? Surely that superb and wonderful manifestation of the love of God in the Cross of Christ should melt into running rivers of gratitude all the ice of our hearts.

"He gave Himself for me!" Let us turn to Him and say: "Lo! I give myself to Thee. Thou art mine. Make me Thine by the constraint of Thy love, so utterly, and so saturate my spirit with Thyself, that it shall not only be Thine, but in a very deep sense it shall be Thee, and that it may be no more I that live, but Christ that liveth in me."

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE INHERITANCE—GOD'S IN US, AND OURS IN GOD.

SERMON XVIII.

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE INHERITANCE—GOD'S IN US AND OURS IN GOD.

"Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." Ephes i. 14.

I HAVE chosen these words this morning, and ventured to isolate them from their connection because of their bearing upon the subject of our last two sermons. You will observe that the Apostle here is evidently intending to bring together the two aspects of the reciprocal possession of God by believers, and of believers by God, which has occupied us in these discourses.

"The Holy Spirit of promise," given to all who believe, is here declared to dwell in and to seal believers as the "earnest" of their "inheritance"; whilst, on the other hand, that sealing is declared to last until—or, as seems more probably the rendering of the proposition here, to be done with a view unto—the full redemption of God's purchased "possession." So that the two halves of the thought are intentionally brought together in these words of our text. And about both of them—God's possession of us and our possession of God—it is asserted or implied, that they are partially realised here, and are to be realised more fully in the future.

An "earnest" is a portion of the estate which is paid over to the purchaser on the completion of the purchase, as the token that all is his and will come into his hands in due time. Like that part of a man's wages given to him in advance when he is engaged; like the shilling put into the hand of a recruit; like the half-crown given to the farm-servant at the hiring-fair; like the bit of turf that in some old ceremonials used to be solemnly presented to the sovereign on his investiture; it is a portion of the whole possession, the same in kind, but a very tiny portion, which yet carries with it the acknowledgment of ownership and the assurance of full possession.

So, says my text, the Spirit of God is the "earnest of the inheritance," a small portion of it granted to us to-day, and the pledge that all shall be granted in the future. And the same idea of present imperfection is suggested in the corresponding clause, which speaks about God's *entire* purchase (for such is the emphasis in the original) of His possession as also a thing of the future.

So then here are the three points that I purpose to consider; first, the imperfect present; second, the present, imperfect as it is, still a guarantee and pledge of the future; and lastly, the perfect future which is the outcome of the imperfect present.

I.—First a word about this imperfect present, which is put here as being on the one side the earnest of our inheritance, and on the other side as being God's partial acquisition of us as His Possession.

Now, you may remember, perhaps, that in the former sermons I said that we possess God in the measure in which we know Him, love Him, and have communion and sympathy with Him. These things, knowledge, love, communion, sympathy, make a very real and a very precious possession of God, and he who has God thus has Him as truly, though not as perfectly, as the angels in Heaven that bow before His throne.

But though that is true, there is yet another aspect of this possession of God suggested in the words of my text. The Holy Spirit of promise comes to every man that believes in Jesus Christ, and enters into his heart and becomes his. That is the truest way in which man possesses God. The greatest gift that my faith brings down to me from Heaven is the gift of an indwelling Spirit—of an indwelling God. For the Spirit of God *is* God. He that has God in his heart by the dwelling there, in mystic reality, of the Divine Spirit, possesses Him as truly as he possesses love or memory, imagination or hope.

There can be no possession deeper, none greater, none more real than the possession which every one of us may have of an indwelling God for our life and our peace. It passes all human analogy. Love gives us the ownership, most really and most sweetly, of the hearts that we love; but after all the yearning desires for union, and experience of oneness in sympathy, the awful wall of partition between spirits remains. Life may, and death must, separate, but he that has God's Divine Spirit with him, has God for the life of his life and the soul of his soul. And we possess Him when, by faith in Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God dwells in our hearts.

But most real and most blessed as that union and possession is, my text tells us it is incomplete.

I need not dwell upon that in order to prove it; I only want to apply and urge the truth for a moment. We have an Infinite Spirit to dwell with us; how finite and little is our possession of it! The Spirit of God is set forth in Scripture under the symbol of "a rushing, mighty wind," and you and I say that we are Christ's, and that we have Him. How does it come, then, that our sails flap idly on the mast, and we lie becalmed, and making next to no progress? The Spirit of God is set forth in Scripture under the symbol of "flaming tongues of fire," and you and I say that we have it; how is it, then, that this thick-ribbed ice is round our hearts, and our love is all so tepid? The Spirit of God is set forth in Scripture under the symbol of "rivers of water"; and you and I say that we possess it. How is it, then, that so much of our hearts and of our natures is given up to barrenness, and dryness, and deadness? Oh, brethren, with an Infinite Spirit for our Guest and Indweller, any of us that look at our own hearts must feel that my text is too surely true, and that the present possession of God by the best of us is but a partial and incomplete possession.

And the same facts of wavering faith, cold affection, and imperfect consecration which show how little we have of God, show likewise how little God has of us. We say that we are His, and live to please ourselves. We profess to belong to another, and to that other we render fragments, of ourselves, and scarcely even fragments of our time and of our efforts. His! and yet all day long never thinking of Him. His! and yet from morning till night never refraining from a thing because we know it is contrary to His will, or spurred to do a thing that is contrary to ours because we know it is His. His! and yet we wallow in selfishness. His! and yet we live Godless. Christian men and women! it is only a little corner of your souls that really belongs to God. Alas, alas! for the imperfections and incompleteness of our possession of God, of Whom we hold but the merest shred, and of His possession of us, Who has conquered such a little strip of the whole field of our nature.

Now, do not forget that this incompleteness of possession, looked at in both aspects, is to a certain extent inevitable and must go with us all through life. And so do not let any of us rush precipitately to the conclusion that we are *not* Christians because we find what poor Christians we are. Do not let us say—"If there were any reality in my faith, it would be, not a dotted line, but one continuous and unbroken." Do not let us write bitter things against ourselves, because we find that we have only got "the earnest of the inheritance," and that the inheritance has not yet come.

And, on the other hand, do not make a pillow for laziness of that most certain truth, nor, because there must always be imperfections in the Christian career here, apply that as an excuse for the individual instances of imperfection as they crop up. You know, when you are honest with yourselves, that each breach of continuity in your faith and obedience might have been prevented. You know that there was no inevitable necessity for your doing that piece of badness that rises in your memory; that there was no reason that could not have been overcome, for any failure of consecration or wavering of faith or act of disobedience and rebellion which has ever marked your course. Granted, that imperfection is the law, but also remember that the individual instances of imperfection are to be debited not to law, but to us, and are not to be lamented over as inevitable, though painful, issues of our condition, but to be confessed as sins. "My fault, O Lord! my fault and mine only."

Many Christian people forget that if our present condition be, as it certainly is, necessarily imperfect, it ought also to be, and it will be, if there be any vital force of Christian principle within us, constantly and indefinitely approximating to the ideal standard of perfection that gleams there ahead of us. Or, to put it into plainer English, if you have life you will grow. If there be any real possession of the inheritance, it will be like the rolling fences that they used to have in certain parts of the country, where a squatter settled himself down upon a bit of a royal forest, and had a hedge that could be moved outwards and shifted on by degrees ; till from having begun with a little bit big enough for a cabbage garden, he ended with a piece big enough for a farm.

And that is what we are always to do, to be always acquiring, "adding field to field" in the great inheritance that is ours. But a mournfully large number of professing Christians have lost the very notion of progress; and content themselves with saying : "Oh ! we shall always be imperfect. As long as we are here in this world we cannot make ourselves different." No ! you cannot make yourselves perfect, but if you are not growing at all, I would pray you to ask yourselves if you are living at all. Do not be content, as so many of you are, to be like invaders, who, after years of occupation, are unable to advance beyond the strip of shore which they seized at first, while all the interior lies unconquered and in arms against them.

So remember that if we have any real possession of God or God of us, it will not only be an imperfect possession, but an imperfect possession daily becoming more complete.

II.—Now turn to the second thought here—that this imperfect present, in its very imperfection, is a prophecy and a pledge of a perfect future. The "earnest of our inheritance" points on to the full "redemption of the purchased possession."

The facts of Christian experience are such as that they inevitably lead up to the conclusion that there is a life beyond. All that is good and blessed about religion, our faith, the joy that comes from our faith, the sweetness of communion, the aspiration after the increase of fellowship with Him ; all these, to the man that enjoys them, are the best proof that they are going to last for ever, and that death can have no power over them. "Like thoughts whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that they are born for immortality."

To love, to know, to reach the hands out through the shows of time and sense, and to grasp an unseen reality that lies away beyond, is, to any man that has ever experienced the emotion and done the thing, one of the strongest of all demonstrations that nothing belonging to this dusty low region of the physical can touch that immortal aspiration that knits him to God ; but that whatsoever may befall the husk and shell of him, his faith, his love, his obedience, his consecration, are eternal, and may laugh at death and the grave. And I believe that even to the men who have not that experience, the fact of religious emotion, the fact of worship, ought to be one of the best demonstrations of a future life.

But I pass that with these simple remarks, and touch another thing ; the very incompleteness of our possession of God, and of God's possession of us, points onwards to, and, as it seems to me, demands a future. The imperfection, as well as the present attainments of our Christian experience, proclaim a coming time. That we are no better than we are, being as good as we are, seems to make it inconceivable that this evidently half-done work is going to be broken off short at the side of the grave.

Here is a certain force acting in a man's nature, the power of God's good Spirit, evidently capable of producing effects of entire transformation. Such being the cause, who, looking at the effects, can doubt that sometime and somewhere there will be less disproportion between the two? The engine is evidently not working full power. The characters of Christians at the best are so inconsistent and contradictory that they are evidently only in the making. It is clear that we are looking at unfinished work, and surely the great Master Builder who has laid such a foundation-stone tried and precious, will not begin to build and be unable to finish. Every Christian life, at its best and noblest, shows, as it were, the ground plan of a great structure partly carried out—a bit of walling here, vacancy there, girders spanning wide spaces, but gaping for a roof, a chaos and a confusion. It may look a thing of shreds and patches, and they that pass by the way begin to mock. But the very fact that it is incomplete prophesies to wise men, of the day when the headstone shall be brought with shouting, and the flag hoisted on the roof tree. Fools and children, says the proverb, should not see half-done work—certainly they should not judge it.

Wait a bit. There comes a time when tendencies shall be facts, and when influences shall have produced their appropriate effects ; and when all that is partial and broken shall be consummate and entire in the Kingdom beyond the stars. Wait ! and be sure that the good and the bad, so strangely blended in Christian experience, are alike charged with the prophecy of a glorious and perfect future.

III.—Then, lastly, my text in the one clause asserts, and in the other implies, that the future is the perfecting of the present.

The "earnest" points onwards to an inheritance the same in kind, but immensely greater in degree. The "redemption of the possession" is a somewhat singular expression ; for we are accustomed to regard the great act of redemption as already past in the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross. But the expression is employed here, as in several other places, to express not so much the act of purchase, the paying of the price of our salvation, which is done once for all and long ago, as the historical working out of the results of that price paid in the *entire* deliverance of the *whole* nature of man from *every* form of captivity to *anything* that would prevent his *full* possession by God.

A very essential part of that entire deliverance is that which the Apostle calls the redemption of the body (Rom. viii. 23), and which he there puts in contrast with the present possession of the "*first-fruits* of the Spirit," as here the redemption is contrasted with the *earnest* of the Spirit. That full deliverance takes place, according to this Epistle (iv. 30) at a definite future period, called therefore, "the day of redemption," which is, I suppose, the time when the whole man, body, soul, and spirit, in the Resurrection-glory shall be delivered from every form of evil, limitation, and sin; and shall be lifted up into the full light and knowledge of God. Then God will possess men, when the whole man is capable of holding or possessing God. Then redemption will be completed in effect, which was completed in cause and in purchase when He said: "It is finished," and bowed His head and died.

Time will not allow me to dwell upon the many thoughts involved here. One is that the main hope and glory of that future is the perfect possession of and by God.

"We shall know even as we are known." "Through a glass darkly, but then face to face," says Paul, suggesting great changes in the degree of our knowledge of, and friendly communion with, God, but also seeming to imply some unknown changes in the manner of our beholding, which may be connected with the new powers of that "body of glory" like our Lord's which will then be ours. It is quite conceivable that the physical universe may have qualities as real as light and heat, and scent and sound, which we could appreciate if we had other senses appropriate, as we have sight and touch, and smell and hearing. And so it is quite conceivable that when clothed upon with our "house which is from Heaven," which will have a great many more windows in it than the earthly house of this tabernacle, which is built for stormy weather, there will be sides and aspects of the Divine nature that we do not know anything about to-day which shall be communicable and communicated to us.

Be that as it may, a deeper knowledge, a fixed love, an unbroken communion, with all distractions and interruptions swept clean away for ever, so that we shall dwell for evermore in the House of the Lord, these are the plain elements which make the very Heaven of heavens, and which ought to make the joy of our hope. In the measure in which we know and love Him, in that measure shall we be known and loved by Him. He and we shall be so interwoven as that we shall be inseparable. We shall cleave to God and God shall cleave to us.

Oh! how small and insignificant all other notions of a future life are as compared with that! The accidents of locality and circumstance should ever be kept subordinate in the pictures which imagination may draw of what is beheld through "the gates ajar" by "little pilgrims in the unseen." The representations which seem to aim at making another world as like this one as may be, dwarf its greatness, and tend to obscure the conditions of entering into its rest. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be" is as much a revelation as "When He shall appear we shall be like Him." As a great painter concentrates finish and light on the face of his sitter, and purposely keeps the rest of the picture slight, there is one face that should fill the dim, dark curtain of the future—the face of Christ, and all else may be thrown in in mere sketchy outline. We know that future chiefly by negations and by symbols, and the one positive fact is that we shall have Him and He will possess us. It is enough for the disciple that he be as, and that he be with and have, his Master.

It is a solemn thought that this ultimate perfect possession of and by God is evolved from a germ which must be planted now if it is to flourish there. "The child is father of the man." Every present is the result of all the past; every future will be the result of the past and the present. Everybody admits that about this life, but there are some of us that seem to forget it with regard to another world.

We know too little of the effect that is produced upon men by the change of death to dogmatise; but one may be quite sure that the law of continuity will go on into the other world. Or, to put it into plainer English, a man on the other side of the grave will be the same as he was on this side. The line will run straight on; it may be slightly refracted by passing from an atmosphere of one density to another of a different, but it will be very slightly. The main direction will be the same.

What is there in death that can change a man's will? I can fancy death making an idiot wise, because idiocy comes from physical causes. I can fancy death giving people altogether different notions of the folly of sin; but I do not know anything in the physical fact of death, or in the accompanying alterations that it produces upon spiritual consciousness, in so far as they are known to us, that can alter the dominant bias and set of a man's nature. It seems to me more likely that it will intensify that dominant bias, whatever it is; that good men will become better, and bad men worse when the limitations of incomplete organs are gone. At all events, do not run risks with such a very shaky hypothesis as that death will change the main direction of your life; but remember that what a man sows he shall reap, that the present is the parent of the future, and that unless we have the earnest of the inheritance here, and pass into the other world, bearing that earnest in our hands, there seems little reason why we should expect that, when we stand before Him empty-handed, we can claim a portion therein.

I was passing a little town garden a day or two ago, of which the owner had got a young weeping willow that he had put in the plot in front of his door. He had bent down its branches and put them round the hoop of an old wine-cask to teach them to droop. And after a bit, when they have been set, he will take away the hoop, but though it be gone the branches will never spring upwards, wherever you transplant the tree.

Are you doing that with your souls? If you give them the downward set they will keep it, though the earth to which you have fastened them be burnt up with fervent heat, and the soul be transplanted into another region.

Let me beseech you to yield yourself to God in Christ, and by faith, love, and true submission, to take Him for your treasure and your King. Then Heaven will perfect the partial knowledge and incomplete service of earth, and will be the consummation and not the contradiction of your life here. Let it be true of you that there is none on earth whom you desire beside God, and it will be true that He will be for you the very Heaven of heavens!

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD AND HIS BLESSING.

SERMON XIX.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD AND HIS BLESSING.

"Unto you first, God, having raised up His Servant, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." Acts iii. 26 (Revised Version).

SIX weeks passed between the Crucifixion and Pentecost. The incidents recorded in this chapter must certainly have occurred very soon, if not immediately, after the Day of Pentecost. The entire revolution in the whole tone and bearing of the disciples, in that short space of a couple of months, is a problem that needs accounting for. The greatness of the change is nowhere more conspicuous than in the instance of the Apostle Peter himself—two months before, frightened out of all his faith by a saucy maid-servant and a few hangers-on at Pilate's court; two months before, having buried all his hopes in his Master's grave; and now grown all at once into a hero, with altogether a new insight into Christian truth. How had it all come about? Is it to be believed that nothing had happened but Christ's death? How could that have cleared and strengthened these men's conceptions and faith? How could that have bound them far more closely together than ever they had been before? Something is wanted to account for the change.

If you bring in the Resurrection and the Ascension, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, you get an adequate explanation. If you try to get rid of these for the sake of eliminating the supernatural from the history, you get rid of the supernatural, and you make it unnatural; a psychological contradiction, in blank, staring antagonism to all the possibilities of the action of sane men.

These words come out of one of the three addresses belonging to this period, which are preserved for us in the Book of the Acts—addresses which, in certain respects, are unlike both what the Apostles said and thought before, and what they said and thought afterwards. They bear traces of a transition period; and the facts that we meet in them some forms of speech which we do not find at a subsequent period, and that also we do not meet in them some teaching that afterwards appeared in the course of the development of Christian doctrine, are very valuable evidence that these are authentic records of the first days of the Church.

I.—In dealing with these words, we may notice first, the boldness and loftiness of the claim which is here made for Jesus Christ.

Long ago Peter had said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And as long as Jesus Christ had been with them none of them had wavered in that belief: but the Cross shattered all that for a time; and the sad-faced two that went down to Emmaus represented accurately the feelings of all their brethren when they said, with such a bitter emphasis upon the past tense: "We *trusted* that it had been He that should have redeemed Israel." In the interval between the death and resurrection, Jesus Christ was in the same category as "Theudas which had boasted himself to be somebody, and was slain and all as many as obeyed him, were scattered and brought to nought." (Acts v. 36.) There had been plenty of pretenders to the Messiahship, and death had disposed of all their claims. And so it would have been with Christ; and you would never have heard anything about Him unless He had risen from the dead. But the faith and hope in His Messiahship which had died with Him on the Cross, rose with Him to newness of life—crucified in weakness, and raised in strength and glory—as we see from such words as these of Peter here, in which he proclaims with new meaning and emphasis the mission of his Master :—"God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you."

Now the characteristic of these early addresses contained in the second, third, and fourth chapters of the Acts, is the clear decisiveness with which they put forward Christ as the fulfilment of Jewish prophecy. It seems as if the Cross and the Resurrection had poured a flood of light on the Old Testament. Psalm and prophecy assume new significance. Lawgiver and monarch have a new purpose. They point onwards to Him, and "all they that go before cry, Hosanna, blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord." If we could read these discourses with sympathy for the speaker, and think of them as the eager words of a man awed and surprised and gladdened as the new light floods his mind, we should know them better. To us they are rigid and cold, like iron bars; but they were all hot and fluid when they poured from his lips like metal from the furnace.

Almost every word here has reference to some great utterance of the past, which now for the first time Peter is beginning to understand.

For instance, "God, having *raised up* His Son Jesus." Now in these words there is no reference to the Resurrection, but if you look back for a verse or two you will see what there is a reference to. "Moses truly said unto the fathers: A prophet shall the Lord your God *raise up* unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you." And what can be more clear here than that the Apostle is claiming that the ancient prophecy of a prophet like unto his brethren, raised up by God, is fulfilled in Jesus Christ? Now that prediction from the Pentateuch, no doubt, refers to the prophetic order, and the word, "a prophet," is not primarily a singular, meaning an individual, but a collective, meaning a class. But still the order does not come up to the ideal of the prophecy—as was seen even before a person appeared who did. For the appendix to the Book of Deuteronomy is plainly referring to the prophecy, and declaring the shortcomings of the whole prophetic order when it sadly says, "And there arose *not* a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses." When these words were added we do not know. Evidently they presuppose the existence of a series of prophets extending through a considerable period, and if we adopted modern theories of the date of the book, these would increase the significance of these last words, considered as the verdict of experience on the inferiority of all the prophets to the great law-giver in certain specified respects. That saying at the close of the book of the law is a confession of unfulfilled hopes which still burn on, though disappointed for weary years, and still spread before God His own promise as in unspoken prayer that He would accomplish His own word on which He had caused men to hope. And it seems a perfectly legitimate position to say that the prophetic order itself was a prophecy by reason of the very incompleteness of the noble men who composed it, and that not only by their words, but by their office and by their limitations, they pointed onwards to Him who is the perfect Revealer of God to man, the perfect Inspirer, to whom God gives not His Spirit by measure, nor at intervals, and who not only, like the great law-giver, beheld God face to face, but from the beginning dwelt in the bosom of the Father and therefore declares Him perfectly to men. The manifold methods and fragmentary portions of the revelations to the prophetic order are surpassed by the one final and complete utterance in the Son, given to the world for evermore as noon day outshines the twilight dawn. He is chief of the prophets as He is Prince of all the kings of the earth and the Priest. And all this is hinted and implied in that one significant and pregnant word: "God, having *raised up* His Son."

Another great claim for Christ is suggested by that other word "His *Son* Jesus." Now those of you who use the Revised Version will see that for "Son" is substituted "Servant," and rightly. This is not the place to enter into any discussion of the reasons for that change, but I may just perhaps in two or three sentences explain it sufficiently to my hearers who do not follow the original. The Greek word, then, which our Authorised Version translates "Son" and the Revised Version translates "Servant" means, literally, a "boy" or a "child," and like our own English equivalent, is sometimes used with the meaning of "a servant." For instance, we talk about "a boy," or "a maid," or "a man," meaning thereby to express the fact of service in a graceful and gentle way; to cover over the harsher features of authority. So the centurion in Matthew's Gospel, when he comes to Christ and asks Him to heal his little page, calls him "his boy," which our Bible properly translates as "servant,"—the same word that is employed here. The reasons for adopting "servant" here rather than "son" are these: that the New Testament has a distinct expression for the "Son of God," which is not the word employed here: and that the Septuagint—the Greek version of the Old Testament—has the same expression which is employed here as the translation of the well-known phrase occurring especially in Isaiah's prophecy, "the Servant of the Lord."

Now it is interesting to notice that this expression, "the Servant of God," as applied to Jesus Christ, only occurs at this period. We never find it earlier, we never find it later. We find it here and here only, in this sermon of Peter's, and in some other words of his in the next chapter. Altogether it occurs four times in these two chapters, and never again Does not that look like the frequent repetition of a new thought which had just come to a man and was taking up his whole mind for the time? The Cross and the Resurrection had opened his eyes to see that the dim majestic figure that looked out on him from the prophecy had had a historical existence in the dear Master whom he had lived beside; and we can almost perceive the gladness and surprise swelling his heart as he thinks—"Ah! then *He* is 'My servant whom I upheld.' Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Wonder of wonders, it is of Jesus of Nazareth, and we are His witnesses." It is not strange that that name should be ever on his lips in these days.

If you turn to the second half of Isaiah's prophecies, you will find that they might almost be called the biography of the Servant of the Lord. And whilst I quite admit, in the same way as I admitted about the "Prophet like unto me," that the collective Israel is often intended by the title "the Servant of the Lord," there remain other parts of the prophecy—the shining summits of the table-land, as it were—which cannot apply to any class, but have distinctly a person for their subject, and which cannot apply to any person but One, that is the Person that died and lived again.

For instance, is there any fact in the history of any community or any person which can correspond to the words, "when His soul shall make an offering for sin He shall see His seed"? Who is it whose death is the birth of His children, whom after His death He will see? Who is it whose death is His own voluntary act? Who is it whose death is a sacrifice for others' sin? Who is it whose days are protracted after death, and who carries out more prosperously the pleasure of the Lord after He has died? Surely there is but One of whom these things, and many more that are said of the Servant of the Lord, are true.

But that name on Peter's lips is not only a reference to prophecy, but it is a very beautiful revelation of the impression of absolute perfection which Christ's character made. Here was a man that "had companied with Him all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out amongst them," who knew Him through and through; and the impression made upon him, when he came to think of his Master's life, was this:—"All the time that I saw Him there was never a trace of anything but obedience. All His life was pure and perfect submission to the Divine will." Jesus asserted the same thing for Himself in many words. No consciousness of sin or incompleteness ever found utterance from His lips, but, on the other hand, words unexampled in the serenity of their claim to absolute purity:—"I do always the things that please Him;" "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" Strange claims from one who is meek and lowly of heart! Stranger still, the world, not usually tolerant of pretensions to sanctity, has allowed and endorsed the claim, and these humble friends of His, who stood by and watched Him, who summered and wintered with Him, bear eager witness to His perfect life.

So the claim rises up into yet loftier regions; for clearly enough, a perfect and stainless man is either an impossible monster or something more. And they that fully believe that God's will was absolutely and exclusively and completely done by Jesus Christ, in all consistency, if they will carry out their principles, must go a step further and say, "He that perfectly did the Father's will was more than one of us, stained and sinful men." There is one biography, and there is but one, on the title-page of which might be written, "Lo, I come. I delight to do Thy will, O my God," and the last page of which might truly bear, "He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth" —and God and man, and Heaven with its attendant angels, and hell with its baffled Prince, would attest the words.

II.—Now, turn to the next point that comes out of the words before us, the dawning vision of a kingdom of world-wide blessings.

Peter and all his brethren had had their full share of Jewish prejudices. But I suppose that when they found the tongues of fire sitting on their heads, and when they found themselves speaking in so many different languages, even they began to apprehend that they had been intrusted with a world-wide gospel; and Pentecost taught them, if it taught nobody else, that Christ's Kingdom was to cover all the earth. The words before us mark very clearly the growing of that consciousness of the world-wide destination of the Gospel, while yet the Jewish prerogative of precedence is firmly held. "Unto you *first*" —that was the law of the apostolic working. But they were beginning to learn that if there were a "first," there must also be a "second"; and that the very words of promise to the father of the nation which he had just quoted pointed to "all the nations of the earth" being blessed in the seed of Abraham.

If Israel was first to receive the blessing, it was only that through Israel it might flow over into the whole Gentile world. That is the true spirit of "Judaism," which is so often spoken of as "narrow" and "exclusive." There is nothing clearer in the Old Testament than that, according to its view, the fire is kindled in Israel that it may give warmth to all that are in the house; and the candle is lighted in Israel in order that it might shed light on all the chambers of the world. Israel was the first recipient, in order that it might be the transmitter of God's light and knowledge to all the world. That was the genius of "Judaism," and that is Peter's faith here.

Then again what grand confidence is here! What a splendid audacity of faith it is for the Apostle with his handful of friends to stand up in the face of his nation to say: "This Man, whom you hung on a tree, is going to be the blessing of the whole world."

Why! it is like the old Roman story of putting up to auction in the Forum the very piece of land that the enemy's camp was pitched upon, whilst their tents were visible over the wall. So magnificent was their confidence that victory is certain.

And how did all that come? Was all that heroism and enthusiasm of confident success born out of the grave of a dead man, do you think? I do not believe it, and I do not think anybody that has an eye for the probabilities of human conduct will believe it. But the Resurrection was the foundation of it, and explains it, as nothing else can do.

III.—The last thing to be observed here is the purely spiritual conception of what Christ's blessing is. "To bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

What has become of all the Jewish notions of the blessings of Messiah's Kingdom? Most of them, no doubt, had faded away, as the meaning of and need for the Cross began to be more clear, and the high and pure conception of Christ's work which it teaches began to take definiteness in their minds. That had not been the kind of kingdom of which they had dreamed when they had sought to be first in it. But now the Cross had taught Peter that, as he says in one of his other early discourses, Him hath God raised up a Prince and a Saviour to give—strange gift for a prince to have in his hand—"to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins."

The heart, then, of Christ's work for the world is deliverance from sin. That is what man needs most. There are plenty of other remedies offered for the world's ills—culture, art, new political and social arrangements, progress of science and the like. God forbid that I should say a word that might seem to depreciate these, but I tell you, and your own consciences tell you, that the disease goes deeper than these things can cure. The Bible diagnoses the disease grimly and gravely, because it knows it can cure it. You may as well try to put out Vesuvius with a tea-spoonful of cold water as to cure the sickness of humanity with anything that does not grapple with the fundamental mischief, and that is a wicked heart. There is only one Man that ever pretended He could deal with that, and that is Jesus Christ. And it took *Him* all His power to deal with it; but He did it! And there is only one way by which *He* could deal with it, and that was by dying for it, and He did it! So He has conquered.

"Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook?" When you can lead a crocodile out of the Nile with a bit of silk thread round his neck, you will be able to overcome the plague of the world, and that of your own heart, with anything short of the great sacrifice made by Jesus Christ.

The one thing the world wants is the blessing He alone can give it, and that blessing is deliverance from sin. No man will understand Christ's Gospel unless He begins there. I believe that the secret of most of the mistaken and partial views of Christian truth lies here, that people have not got into their hearts and consciences a sense of their own sinfulness. And so you get a tepid, self-sufficient and superficial Christianity ; and you get ceremonials, and high and dry morality, masquerading under the guise of religion : and you get Unitarian and semi-Unitarian tendencies in churches and preachers and thinkers. But if once there came a wholesome, living consciousness of what is meant when men say "We are sinners," all such mutilated Christianity would crumble because it would be felt to be all inadequate to the needs of the conscience.

So, brethren, I beseech you, to put yourself in the right place to understand the Gospel by the recognition of that fact. But do not stop there. More than the right understanding of Christianity is at stake. It is a matter of life and death for you to put yourselves in the right place to receive Christ's richest blessing. You can only do that by feeling in your own conscience the fact of your own personal sin, and so coming to Him to do for you what you cannot do for yourselves, and no one but He can do for you—deliver you from your sins by His forgiving love, and turn you from the inclination to them by His sanctifying Spirit.

And notice how strongly the text puts the individuality of this process. "Every one"—or rather "each one"—singly to be turned, and so, as it were, universality reached through the multitude of single souls. If all kindreds of earth are to be blessed, they are to be blessed one by one, as every one is turned from his iniquities. The inadequate notions of Christianity that I have been speaking about are all characterised by this amongst other things : that they regard it as a social system diffusing social blessings and operating on communities by elevating the general tone and quickening the public conscience—and so on. Christianity does do that. But it begins with dealing with men one by one, and men must deal one by one with it, or they will never get its highest blessings.

Christ is like a great King, who passing through the streets of His capital scatters His *largesse* over the multitude, but He reserves His richest gifts for the men that enter His presence chamber. Even those of us who have no close personal union with Him receive of His gifts. Every man, woman, and child in England is better and purer to-day because Christ died on the Cross. But for their deepest needs and their highest blessings they must go to Christ by their own personal faith. As the old mystics defined prayer, so I might define faith : the flight of the solitary soul to the only Christ. You must go to Him by yourself and for yourself, and receive into your own hands the blessing which is for the world. The straight gate, like the wicket at some public hall, takes in one at a time. Blessed be God ! There is nothing to pay as you pass through, and when you pass you enter into a large place.

THE GRADUAL HEALING OF THE BLIND MAN.

SERMON XX.

THE GRADUAL HEALING OF THE BLIND MAN.

"And Jesus cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto Him, and besought Him to touch him. And He took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when He had spit on his eyes, and put His hands upon him, He asked him if he saw aught. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees walking. After that He put His hands upon his eyes and made him look up; and he was restored and saw every man clearly." Mark viii, 22-25.

THIS miracle, which is only recorded by the Evangelist Mark, has about it several very peculiar features. Some of these it shares with one other of our Lord's miracles, which also is found only in this Gospel, and which ocurred nearly about the same time; that miracle of healing the deaf and dumb man recorded in the previous chapter. Both of them have these points in common: that our Lord takes the sufferer apart and works His miracle in privacy; that in both there is an abundant use of the same singular means—our Lord's touch, and the saliva upon His finger; and that in both there is the urgent injunction of entire secrecy laid upon the recipient of the benefit.

But this miracle had another peculiarity, in which it stands absolutely alone, and that is that the work is done in stages; that the power which at other times has but to speak and it is done, here seems to labour, and the cure comes slowly; that in the middle Christ pauses, and like a physician trying the experiment of a drug, asks the patient if any effect is produced, and getting the answer that some mitigation is realised, repeats the application, and perfect recovery is the result.

Now, how unlike that is to all the rest of Christ's miraculous working we do not need to point out; but the question may arise, what is the meaning, and what the reason, and what the lessons of this unique and anomalous form of miraculous working? It is to that question that I wish to turn now: for I think that the answer will open up to us some very precious things in regard to that great Lord, the revelation of whose heart and character is the inmost and the loftiest meaning both of His words and of His works.

I take these three points of peculiarity to which I have referred: the privacy, the strange and abundant use of means veiling the miraculous power, and the gradual, slow nature of the cure. I see in them these three things: Christ isolating the man that He would heal; Christ stooping to the sense-bound nature by using outward means; and Christ making His power work slowly, to keep abreast of the man's slow faith.

I.—First, then, here we have Christ isolating the man whom He wanted to heal. Now, there may have been something about our Lord's circumstances and purposes at the time of this miracle which accounted for the great urgency with which at this period He impresses secrecy upon all around Him. What that was it is not necessary for us to enquire here, but this is worth noticing, that in obedience to this wish, on His own part, for privacy at the time, He covers over with a veil His miraculous working, and does it quietly, as one might almost say, in a corner. He never sought to display His miraculous working; here He absolutely tries to hide it. That fact of Christ taking pains to conceal His miracle carries in it two great truths, first, about the purpose and nature of miracles in general, and second, about His character, as to each of which a few words may be said.

This fact, of a miracle done in intended secrecy, and shrouded in deep darkness, suggests to us the true point of view from which to look at the whole subject of miracles.

People say they were meant to be attestations of His Divine mission. Yes, no doubt that is true partially; but that was never the sole nor even the main purpose for which they were wrought; and when anybody asked Jesus Christ to work a miracle for that purpose only, He rebuked the desire and refused to gratify it. He wrought the miracle, not coldly, in order to witness to His mission, but every one of them was the token, because it was the outcome, of His own sympathetic heart, brought into contact with human need. And instead of the miracles of Jesus Christ being cold, logical proofs of His mission, they were all glowing with the earnestness of a loving sympathy, and came from Him at sight of sorrow as naturally as rays from the sun.

Then, on the other hand, the same fact carries with it, too, a lesson about His character. Is not He here doing what He tells us to do; "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth?" He dares not wrap His talent in a napkin, He would be unfaithful to His mission if He hid His light under a bushel. All goodness "does good by stealth," even if it does not "blush to find it fame"—and that universal mark of true benevolence marked His. He had to solve in His human life what we have to solve, the problem of keeping the narrow path between ostentation of powers and selfish concealment of faculty; and He solved it thus, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps.

But that is somewhat aside from the main purpose to which I wanted to turn in these first remarks. Christ did not invest the miracle with any of its peculiarities for His own sake only. All that is singular about it, will, I think, find its best explanation in the condition and character of the subject, the man on whom it was wrought. What sort of a man was he? Well, the narrative does not tell us much, but if we use our historical imagination and our eyes we may learn something about him. First he was a Gentile; the land in which the miracle was wrought was the half-heathen country on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. In the second place, it was other people that brought him; he does not come of his own accord. Then again, it is their prayer that is mentioned, not his—he asks nothing.

You see him standing there, hopeless, listless; not believing that this Jewish stranger is going to do anything for him; with his impassive blind face glowing with no entreaty to re-enforce his companions' prayers. And suppose he is a man of that sort, with no expectation of anything from this Rabbi, how is Christ to get at him? It is no use talking to him. His eyes are shut, so cannot see the sympathy beaming in His face. There is one thing possible—to lay hold of Him by the hand; and the touch, gentle, loving, firm, says this, at least: "Here is a man that has some interest in me, and whether He can do anything or not for me, He is going to try something." Would not that kindle an expectation in him? And is it not in parable just exactly what Jesus Christ does for the whole world? Is not that act of His by which He put out His hand and seized the unbelieving limp hand of the blind man that hung by his side, the very same in principle as that by which He "taketh hold of the seed of Abraham," and is made like to His brethren? Is not the mystery of the Incarnation and the meaning of it wrapped up as in a germ in that little simple incident, "He put out His hand and touched him?"

Is there not in it too a lesson for all you good-hearted Christian men and women, in all your work? If you want to do anything for your Master and brethren, there is only one way to do it—to come down to their level and get hold of their hands, and then there is some chance of doing them good. We must be content to take the hands of beggars if we are to make the blind to see.

And then, having thus drawn near to the man, and established in his heart some dim expectation of something coming, He gently draws him away out of the little village. I wonder no painter has ever painted that, instead of repeating *ad nauseam* two or three scenes out of the Gospels. I wonder none of them has ever seen what a parable it is—the Christ leading the blind man out into solitude before He can say to him "Behold!" How as they went, step by step, the poor blind eyes not telling the man where they were going, or how far away he was being taken from his friends, his conscious dependence upon this stranger would grow! How he would feel more and more at each step, "I am at His mercy! What *is* He going to do with me?" And how thus there would be kindled in his heart some beginnings of an expectation, as well as some surrendering of himself to Christ's guidance! These two things, the expectation and the surrender, have in them, at all events some faint beginnings and rude germs of the highest faith, to lead up to which is the purpose of all that Christ here does.

And is not that what He does for us all? Sometimes by sorrows, sometimes by sick-beds, sometimes by shutting us out from chosen spheres of activity, sometimes by striking down the dear ones at our sides, and leaving us lonely in the desert—is He not saying to us in a thousand ways. "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place"? As Israel was led into the wilderness that God might "speak to her heart," so often Christ draws us aside, if not by outward providences such as these, yet by awaking in us that solemn sense of personal responsibility and making us feel our solitude, that He may lead us to feel His all-sufficient companionship.

Ah! brethren, here is a lesson from all this—if you want Jesus Christ to give you His highest gifts and to reveal to you His fairest beauty, you must be alone with Him. He loves to deal with single souls. Our lives, many of them, can never be outwardly alone. We are jammed up against one another in such a fashion, and the hurry and pressure of city life is so great with us all that it is often impossible for us to find the outward secrecy and solitude. But a man may be alone in a crowd; the heart may be gathered up into itself, and there may be a still atmosphere round about us in the shop and in the market, and amongst the busy ways of men, in which we and Christ shall be alone together. Unless there be, I do not think any of us will see the King in His beauty or the far-off land. "I was left alone, and I saw this great vision" is the law for all true beholding.

So, dear brethren, try to feel how awful this earthly life of ours is in its necessary solitude; that each of us by himself must shape out his own destiny, and make his own character; that every unit of the swarms upon our streets is a unit that has to face the solemn facts of life for and by itself; that alone you live, that alone you will die; that alone you will have to give account of yourself before God, and in the solitude let the hand of your heart feel for His hand that is stretched out to grasp yours, and listen to Him saying "Lo! I am with you always; to the end of the world." There was no dreariness in the solitude when it was *Christ* that "took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the city."

II.—We have Christ stooping to a sense-bound nature by the use of material helps. No doubt there was something in the man, as I have said, which made it advisable that these methods should be adopted. If he were the sort of person that I have described, slow of faith, not much caring about the possibility of cure, and not having much hope that anything would come of it—then we can see the fitness of the means adopted ; the hand laid upon the eyes, the finger possibly moistened with saliva touching the ball, the pausing to question, the repeated application. They make a ladder by which his hope and confidence might climb to the apprehension of the blessing. And that points to a general principle of the Divine dealings. God stoops to a feeble faith, and gives to it outward things by which it may rise to an apprehension of spiritual realities.

Is not that the meaning of the whole complicated system of Old Testament revelation ? Is not that the meaning of the altars, and priests, and sacrifices, and the old cumbrous apparatus of the Mosaic law ? Was it not all a picture-book in which the infant eyes of the race might see in a material form deep spiritual realities ? Was not that the meaning and explanation of our Lord's parabolic teaching ? He veils spiritual truth in common things that He may reveal it by common things—taking fishermen's boats, their nets, a sower's basket, a baker's dough, and many another homely article, and finding in them the emblems of the loftiest truth.

Is not that the meaning of His own Incarnation ? It is no use talking to men about God, let them see Him ; no use preaching about principles, give them the facts of His life. Revelation does not consist in the setting forth of certain propositions about God, but in the exhibition of the acts of God in a human life.

> "And so the Word was flesh and wrought
> With human hands the creed of creeds."

And still further, may we not say that this is the inmost meaning and purpose of the whole frame of the material universe? It exists in order that, as a parable and a symbol, it may proclaim the things that are unseen and eternal. Its depths and heights, its splendours, and its energies are all in order that through them spirits may climb to the apprehension of the "King eternal, immortal, invisible," and the realities of His spiritual kingdom.

So in regard of all the externals of Christianity, forms of worship, ordinances, and so on—all these, in like manner, are provided in condescension to our weakness, in order that by them we may be lifted above themselves; for the purpose of the temple is to prepare for the time and the place where the seer "saw no temple therein." They are but the cups that carry the wine, the flowers whose chalices bear the honey, the ladders by which the soul may climb to God Himself, the rafts upon which the precious treasure may be floated into our hearts.

If Christ's touch and Christ's saliva healed, it was not because of anything in them, but because He willed it so; and He Himself is the source of all the healing energy. Therefore, let us keep these externals in their proper place of subordination, and remember that in Him, not in them, lies the healing power; and that even Christ's touch may become the object of superstitious regard, as it was when that poor woman that came through the crowd to lay her finger on the hem of His garment, thinking that she could bear away a surreptitious blessing without the conscious outgoing of His power. He healed her because there was a spark of faith in her superstition, but she had to learn that it was not the hem of the garment but the loving will of Christ that cured, in order that the dross of superstitious reliance on the outward vehicle might be melted away, and the pure gold of faith in His love and power might remain.

III.—Lastly, we have Christ accommodating the pace of His power to the slowness of the man's faith.

The whole story, as I have said, is unique, and especially that part of it—"He put His hands upon him, and asked him if he saw aught." One might have expected an answer with a little more gratitude in it, with a little more wonder in it, with a little more emotion in it. Instead of these it is almost surly, or at any rate strangely reticent—a matter of fact answer to the question, and there an end. As our Revised Version reads it better: "I see men, for I behold them as trees walking." Curiously accurate! A dim glimmer had come into the eye, but there is not yet distinctness of outline nor sense of magnitude, which must be acquired by practice. The eye has not yet been educated, and it was only because these blurred figures were in motion that he knew they were not trees. "After that He put His hands upon his eyes and made him look up." Or as the Revised Version has it with a better reading, "and he looked steadfastly." An eager straining of the new faculty to make sure that he had got it, and to test its limits and its perfection. "And he was restored and saw all things clearly."

Now I take it that the worthiest view of that strangely protracted process, broken up into two halves by the question that is dropped into the middle, is this, that it was determined by the man's faith, and was meant to increase it. He was healed slowly because he believed slowly. His faith was a condition of his cure, and the measure of it determined the measure of the restoration; and the rate of the growth of his faith settled the rate of the perfecting of Christ's work on him. As a rule, faith in His power to heal was a condition of Christ's healing, and that mainly because our Lord would rather have men believing than sound of body. They often wanted only the outward miracle, but He wanted to make it the means of insinuating a better healing into their spirits. And so, not that there was any necessary connection between their faith and the exercise of His miraculous power, but in order that He might bless them with His best gifts, He usually worked on the principle, "According to your faith be it unto you." And here, as a nurse or a mother with her child might do, He keeps step with the little steps, and goes slowly because the man goes slowly.

Now, both the gradual process of illumination and the rate of that process as determined by faith, are true for us. How dim and partial a glimmer of light comes to many a soul at the outset of the Christian life! How little a new convert knows about God and self and the starry truths of His great revelation! Christian progress does not consist in seeing new things, but in seeing the old thing more clearly: the same Christ, the same Cross, only more distinctly and deeply apprehended, and more closely incorporated into my very being. We do not grow away from Him, but we grow into knowledge of Him. The first lesson that we get is the last lesson that we shall learn, and He is the Alpha at the beginning, and the Omega at the end of the alphabet—the letters of which make up our knowledge for earth and Heaven.

But then let me remind you that just in the measure in which you expect blessing of any kind, illumination and purifying and help of all sorts from Jesus Christ, just in that measure will you get it. You can limit the working of Almighty power, and can determine the rate at which it shall work on you. God fills the water-pots to the brim, but not beyond the brim; and if, like the woman in the Old Testament story, we stop bringing vessels, the oil will stop flowing. It is an awful thing to think that we have the power, as it were, to turn a stopcock, and so increase or diminish, or cut off altogether the supply of God's mercy and Christ's healing and cleansing love in our hearts. You will get as much of God as you want and no more. The measure of your desire is the measure of your capacity, and the measure of your capacity is the measure of God's gift. "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." And if your faith is heavily shod and steps slowly, His power and His grace will step slowly along with it; keeping rank and step. "According to your faith shall it be unto you."

Ah! dear friends, "Ye are not straitened in Me, ye are straitened in yourselves." Desire Him to help and bless you, and He will do it. Expect Him to do it, and He will do it. Go to Him like the other blind man, and say to Him—"Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me, that I may receive my sight," and He will lay His hand upon you, and at any rate a glimmer will come, which will grow in the measure of your humble, confident desire, until at last He takes you by the hand and leads you out of this poor little village of a world, and lays His finger for a brief moment of blindness upon your eyes and asks you if you see aught. Then you look up, and the first face that you behold shall be His, whom you saw "as through a glass darkly" with your dim eyes in this twilight world.

May that be your experience and mine, through His mercy!

THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME.

SERMON XXI.

THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME.

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, Whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Acts ii., 36.

IT is no part of my purpose at this time to consider the special circumstances under which these words were spoken, nor even to enter upon an exposition of their whole scope. I select them for one reason, the occurrence in them of the three names by which we designate our Saviour—Jesus, Christ, Lord. To us they are very little more than three proper names; they were very different to these men who listened to the characteristically vehement discourse of the Apostle Peter. It wanted some courage to stand up at Pentecost and proclaim on the housetop what he had spoken in the ear long ago. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!" To most of his listeners to say "Jesus is the Christ" was folly, and to say "Jesus is the Lord" was blasphemy.

The three names are names of the same Person, but they proclaim altogether different aspects of His work and His character. The name "Jesus" is the name of the Man, and brings to us a brother; the name "Christ" is the name of office, and brings to us a Redeemer; the name "Lord" is the name of dignity, and brings to us a King.

I.—First, then, the name Jesus is the name of the Man, which tells us of a Brother.

There were many men in Palestine who bore the name of Jesus when He bore it. We find that one of the early Christians had it; and it comes upon us with almost a shock when we read that one "Jesus, called Justus," was the name of one of the friends of the Apostle Paul (Col. iv., 11). But, through reverence on the part of Christians, and through horror on the part of Jews, the name ceased to be a common one. And its disappearance from familiar use has hid from us the fact of its common employment at the time when our Lord bore it. Though it was given to Him as indicative of His office of saving His people from their sins, yet none of all the crowds who knew Him as Jesus of Nazareth supposed that in His name there was any greater significance than in those of the "Simons," "Johns," and Judahs," in the circle of His disciples.

Now the use of Jesus as the proper name of our Lord, is very noticeable. In the Gospels, as a rule, it stands alone hundreds of times, whilst in combination with any other of the titles it is rare. "Jesus Christ," for instance, only occurs, if I count aright, twice in Matthew, once in Mark, twice in John. But if you turn to the Epistles and the latter books of the Scriptures, the proportions are reversed. There you have hundreds of instances of the occurrence of such combinations as "Jesus Christ," "Christ Jesus," "The Lord Jesus," "Christ the Lord," and not frequently the full solemn title, "The Lord Jesus Christ." But the occurrence of the proper name "Jesus" alone is the exception. So far as I know, there are only some thirty or forty instances of its use singly in the whole of the books of the New Testament outside of the four Evangelists. The occasions where it is used are all of them occasions in which one may see that the writer's intention is to put strong emphasis, for some reason or other, on the Manhood of our Lord Jesus, and to assert as broadly as may be, His entire participation with us in the common conditions of our human nature, corporeal and mental.

And I think I shall best bring out the meaning and worth of the name by putting a few of these instances before you.

For example, we find more than once phrases like this: "we believe that *Jesus* died," "having therefore boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of *Jesus*," and the like—which emphasise His death as the death of a man like ourselves, and bring us close to the historical reality of His human pains and agonies for us. "*Christ* died" is the statement which makes the purpose and efficacy of His death more plain, but "*Jesus* died" shows us His death as not only the work of the appointed Messiah, but as the act of our brother man, the outcome of His human love, and never rightly to be understood if His work be thought of apart from His personality.

There is brought into view too, prominently, the side of Christ's sufferings which we are all apt to forget—the common human side of His agonies and His pains. I know that a certain school of preachers, and of unctuous religious hymns, and other forms of composition, dwell a great deal too much for reverence, upon the mere physical aspect of Christ's sufferings. But the temptation, I believe, with most of us is to dwell too little upon that,—to argue about the death of Christ, to think about it as a matter of speculation, to regard it as a mysterious power, to look upon it as an official act of the Messiah that was sent into the world for us; and to forget that He bore a manhood like our own, a body that was impatient of pains and wounds and sufferings, and a human life which like all human lives, naturally recoiled and shrank from the agony of death.

And whilst, therefore, the great message, "It is Christ that died," is ever to be pondered, we have also to think with sympathy and gratitude on the homelier representation coming nearer to our hearts, which proclaims that "Jesus died." Let us not forget the Brother's manhood that had to agonise, and to suffer, and to die as the price of our salvation.

Again, when the Scripture would set our Lord before us, as in His humanity, our pattern and example, it sometimes uses this name, in order to give emphasis to the thought of His Manhood—as, for example, in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "looking unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith." That is to say—a mighty stimulus to all brave perseverance in our efforts after higher Christian nobleness lies in the vivid and constant realisation of the true manhood of our Lord, as the type of all goodness, as having Himself lived by faith, and that in a perfect degree and manner. We are to turn away our eyes from contemplating all other lives and motives, and to "look off" from them to Him. In all our struggles let us think of Him. Do not take poor human creatures for your ideal of excellence, nor tune your harps to their keynotes. To imitate men is degradation, and is sure to lead to deformity; none of them is a safe guide. Black veins are in the purest marble, and flaws in the most lustrous diamonds; but to imitate Jesus is freedom, and to be like Him is perfection. Our code of morals is His life. He is the Ideal incarnate. The secret of all progress is, "Run,—looking unto Jesus."

Then, again, we have His manhood emphasised when

His sympathy is to be commended to our hearts. "The great High Priest, who is passed into the heavens" is "*Jesus*" . . . "who was in all points tempted like as we are." To every sorrowing soul, to all men burdened with heavy tasks, unwelcome duties, pains and sorrows of the imagination, or of the heart, or of the memory, or of physical life, or of the circumstances—to all there comes the thought, "Every ill that flesh is heir to" He knows by experience, and in the Man Jesus we find not only the pity of a God but the sympathy of a Brother.

The Prince of Wales, a fortnight ago, went for an afternoon into the slums in Holborn; and everybody said, and said deservedly, "right" and "princely." *This* Prince has "learned pity in the huts where poor men lie"; and knows by experience all their squalor and misery. The Man Jesus is the sympathetic Priest. The Rabbis, who did not usually see very far into the depth of things, yet caught a wonderful glimpse when they said: "Messias will be found sitting outside the gate of the city *amongst the lepers*." That *is* where He sits; and the perfectness of His sympathy, and the completeness of His identification of Himself with all our tears and our sorrows, is taught us when we learn that our High Priest is not merely Christ the official, but Jesus the Man.

And then you read such words as these: "If we believe that *Jesus* died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." I think anybody that reads with sympathy must feel how very much closer to our hearts that consolation comes, "Jesus rose again," than even the mighty word which the Apostle uses on another occasion, "Christ is risen from the dead." The one tells us of the risen Redeemer, the other tells us of the risen Brother. And wherever there are sorrowing souls, learning loss and following their dear ones into the darkness with yearning hearts, there, too, the consolation comes; they lie down beside their Brother, and with their Brother they shall rise again.

So, again, most strikingly, and yet somewhat singularly, in the words of Scripture which paint most loftily the exaltation of the risen Saviour to the right hand of God, and His wielding of absolute power and authority, it is the old human name that is used; as if the writers would bind together the humiliation and the exaltation, and were holding up hands of wonder at the thought that a Man had risen thus to the Throne of the Universe. What an emphasis and glow of hope there is in such words as these "We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see *Jesus*"—the very Man that was here with us—"crowned with glory and honour." So in the Book of the Revelation the chosen name for Him that sits amidst the glories of the heavens, and settles the destinies of the universe, and orders the course of history, is Jesus. As if the Apostle would assure us that the face which looked down upon him from amidst the blaze of the glory was indeed the face that he knew long ago upon earth, and the breast that "was girded with a golden girdle" was the breast upon which he so often had leaned his happy head.

So the ties that bind us to the Man Jesus should be the human bonds that knit us to one another, transferred to Him and purified and strengthened. All that we have failed to find in men we can find in Him.

Human wisdom has its limits, but here is a Man whose word is truth, who is Himself the truth. Human love is sometimes hollow, often impotent; it looks down upon us, as a great thinker has said, like the Venus of Milo, that lovely statue, smiling in pity, but it has no arms. But here is a love that is mighty to help, and on which we can rely without disappointment or loss. Human excellence is always limited and imperfect, but here is One whom we may imitate and be pure. So let us do like that poor woman in the Gospel story—bring the precious alabaster box of ointment—the love of these hearts of ours, which is the most precious thing we have to give. The box of ointment that we have so often squandered upon unworthy heads—let us come and pour it upon His, not unmingled with our tears, and anoint Him, our beloved and our King. This Man has loved each of us with a brother's heart; let us love Him with all our hearts.

II.—So much for the first name. The second—"Christ" is the name of office, and brings to us a Redeemer. I need not dwell at any length upon the original significance and force of the name; it is familiar, of course, to us all. It stands as a transference into Greek of the Hebrew Messias; the one and the other meaning as we all know, the Anointed.

But what is the meaning of claiming for Christ that He is anointed? A sentence will answer the question. It means that He fulfils all which the inspired imagination of the great ones of the past had seen in that dim Figure that rose before the prophet and psalmist. It means that He is anointed or inspired by the Divine indwelling to be Prophet, Priest, and King all over the world. It means that He is—though the belief had faded away from the minds of His generation—a sufferer whilst a Prince, and to "turn away unrighteousness" from the world, and not from "Jacob" only, by a sacrifice and a death.

I cannot see less in the contents of the Jewish idea, the prophetic idea of the Messias, than these points: Divine inspiration or anointing; a sufferer who is to redeem; the fulfiller of all the rapturous visions of psalmist and of prophet in the past.

And so, when Peter stood up amongst that congregation of wondering strangers and scowling Pharisees, and said: "The Man that died on the Cross, the Rabbi-peasant from half-heathen Galilee, is the Person Whom all the generations have been looking forward to," no wonder that nobody believed him except those whose hearts were touched, for it is never possible for the common mind, at any epoch, to believe that the man that stands beside them is very much bigger than themselves. Great men have always to die, and get a halo of distance around them before their true stature can be seen.

And now two remarks are all I can afford myself upon that, and one is this: the hearty recognition of His Messiahship is the centre of all discipleship. The earliest and the simplest Christian creed, which yet—like the little brown roll in which the infant beech leaves lie folded up—contains in itself all the rest, was this: "Jesus is Christ," and although it is no part of my business to say how much imperfection and confusion of head comprehension may exist with a heart acceptance of Jesus that saves a soul from sin, yet I cannot in faithfulness to my own convictions conceal the belief that he who contents himself with "Jesus" and does not grasp "Christ" has cast away the most valuable and characteristic part of the Christianity which he professes. Surely the most simple inference is that a *Christian* is at least a man who recognises the Christship of Jesus. And I press that upon you, my friends; it is not enough for the sustenance of your own souls and for the cultivation of a vigorous religious life that men should admire, howsoever profoundly and deeply the humanity of the Lord unless that humanity leads them on to see the office of the Messiah to whom their whole hearts cleave. "Jesus is the Christ" is the minimum Christian creed.

And then, still further, let me remind you how the recognition of Jesus as Christ is essential to giving its full value to the facts of the manhood. "Jesus died! Yes! What then? What is that to me? Is that all I have to say? If that is simply a human death, like all the rest, I want to know what makes it a Gospel. I want to know what more interest I have in it than I have in the death of Socrates, or in the death of any men or women whose names were in the obituary column of yesterday's newspaper. "Jesus died." That is the fact. What is wanted to turn the fact into a Gospel? That I shall know Who it was that died, and why He died. "I declare unto you the Gospel which I preach," Paul says, "how that *Christ* died for our sins, according to the Scriptures." The belief that the death of Jesus was the death of the Christ is needful to make that death the means of my deliverance from the burden of sin. If it be only the death of Jesus, it is beautiful, pathetic, as many another martyr's has been, but if it be the death of Christ, then "my faith can lay her hand" on that great sacrifice and know "her guilt was there."

So in regard of His perfect example. If we only see His manhood when we are "looking unto Jesus," the contemplation of His perfection would be as paralysing as spectacles of supreme excellence usually are. But when we can say, "*Christ* also suffered for us, leaving us an example," and so can deepen the thought of His Manhood into that of His Messiahship and the conception of His work as example into that of His work as sacrifice, we can hope that His Divine power will dwell in us to mould our lives to the likeness of His human life of perfect obedience.

So in regard to His resurrection and glorious ascension at the right hand of God. We have not only to think of the solitary man raised from the grave and caught up to the throne. If it were only "Jesus" Who rose and ascended, His resurrection and ascension might be as much to us as the raising of Lazarus, or the rapture of Elijah—namely, a demonstration that death did not destroy conscious being, and that a man could rise to

Heaven, but they would be no more. But if "*Christ* is risen from the dead," He is "become the first-fruits of them that slept." If *Jesus* has gone up on high, others may or may not follow in His train. It may show that manhood is not incapable of elevation to heaven, but it has no power to draw others up after it. But if *Christ* is gone up He is gone to prepare a place for us, not to fill a solitary throne, and His ascension is the assurance that He will lift us too to dwell with Him, and share His triumph over death and sin.

Most of the blessedness and beauty of His example, all the mystery and meaning of His death, and all the power of His resurrection depend on the fact that "it is *Christ* that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God."

III.—"The Lord" is the name of dignity and brings before us the King. There are three grades, so to speak, of dignity expressed by this one word "Lord" in the New Testament. The lowest is that in which it is almost the equivalent of our own English title of respectful courtesy, "Sir," in which sense it is often used in the Gospels, and refers to our Lord as to many other of the persons there. The second is that in which it expresses dignity and authority—and in that sense it is frequently applied to Christ. The third highest is that in which it is the equivalent of the Old Testament "Lord," as a Divine name; in which sense also it is applied to Christ in the New Testament.

The first and last of these may be left out of consideration now: the central one is the meaning of the word here. I have only time to touch upon two thoughts—to connect this name of dignity first with one and then with the other of the two names that we have already considered.

"Jesus is Lord," that is to say, wonderful as it is, the manhood is exalted to supreme dignity. It is the teaching of the New Testament, that our nature in Jesus, the Child of Mary, sits on the throne of the universe and rules over all things. Those rude herdsmen, brothers of Joseph, came into Pharaoh's palace—strange contrast to their tents—and there found their brother ruling over that ancient and highly civilised land! We have the Man Jesus for the Lord over all. Trust His dominion and rejoice in His rule, and bow before His authority. Jesus is Lord.

Christ is Lord. That is to say: His sovereign authority, and dominion are built upon the fact of His being Deliverer, Redeemer, Sacrifice. His Kingdom is a Kingdom that rests upon His suffering. "Wherefore God also hath exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name."

It is because He wears a vesture dipped in blood, that on the vesture is the name written "Kings of kings, and Lord of lords." It is "because He shall deliver the needy when he crieth," as the prophetic psalm has it, that "all kings shall fall down before Him and all nations shall serve Him." Because He has given His life for the world He is the Master of the world. His humanity is raised to the throne because His humanity stooped to the cross. As long as men's hearts can be touched by absolute unselfish surrender; and as long as men can know the blessedness of responsive surrender, so long will He who gave Himself for the world be the Sovereign of the world, and the First-born from the dead be the Prince of all the kings of the earth.

And so, dear friends, our thoughts to-day all point to this lesson. Do not you content yourselves with a maimed Christ. Do not tarry in the Manhood; do not be content with an adoring reverence for the nobility of His soul, the gentle wisdom of His words, the beauty of His character, the tenderness of His compassion. All that will be of small help for your needs. There is more in His mission than that—even His death for you and for all men. Take Him for your Christ, but do not lose the Person in the Work, any more than you lose the Work in the Person And be not content with an intellectual recognition of Him, but bring Him the faith which cleaves to Him and His work as its only hope and peace, and the love which, because of His work as Christ, flows out to the beloved Person Who has done it all. Thus loving Jesus and trusting Christ, you will bring obedience to your Lord and homage to your King, and learn the sweetness and power of the name that is above every name—the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

May we all be able, with clear and unfaltering conviction of the understanding and loving affiance of our whole souls, to repeat as our own the grand words in which so many centuries have proclaimed their faith—words which shed a spell of peacefulness over stormy lives, and fling a great light of hope into the black jaws of the grave. "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord!"

THE SON OF MAN.

SERMON XXII.

THE SON OF MAN.

"Who is this Son of Man?" John xii. 34.

Last Sunday, as you may remember, we were considering the names given in Scripture to our Lord Jesus Christ. I have thought that a suitable sequel to that sermon may be one devoted to the consideration of the remarkable name which our Lord gives to Himself—the Son of Man. And I have selected this instance of its occurrence rather than any other because it brings out a point which is too frequently overlooked, viz., that the name was an entirely strange and enigmatical one to the people who heard it.

This question of utter bewilderment distinctly shows us that, and negatives, as it seems to me, the supposition which is often made that the name "Son of Man" upon the lips of Jesus Christ was equivalent to Messiah. Obviously there is no such significance attached to it by those who put this question. As obviously, for another reason, the two names do not cover the same ground; for our Lord sedulously avoided calling Himself the Christ, and habitually called Himself the Son of Man.

Now one thing to observe about this name is that it is never found upon the lips of any but Jesus Christ. No man ever called Him the Son of Man whilst He was upon earth, and only once do we find it applied to Him in the rest of Scripture, and that is on the occasion on which the first martyr, Stephen, dying at the foot of the old wall, saw "the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." Two other apparent instances of the use of the expression occur, both of them in the Book of Revelation, both of them quotations from the Old Testament, and in both the more probable reading gives :—*A* Son of Man, not "*the* Son of Man."

One more preliminary remark, and I will pass to the title itself. The name has been often supposed to be taken from the remarkable prophecy in the Book of Daniel, of one "like a Son of man," who receives from the Ancient of Days an everlasting kingdom which triumphs over those kingdoms of brute force which the prophet had seen. No doubt there is a connection between the prophecy and our Lord's use of the name, and it is to be observed that what the prophet speaks of is not—"the Son," but "one *like a* Son of man," or in other words, that what the prophecy dwells upon is simply the manhood of the future King in contradistinction to the bestial forms of Lion and Leopard and Bear, whose kingdoms go down before him. Of course Christ fulfils that prediction, and is the "One like a Son of man," but we cannot say that the title is derived from the prophecy, in which, strictly speaking, it does not occur.

What, then, is the force of this name, as applied to Himself by our Lord?

First, we have in it Christ putting out His hand, if I may say so, to draw us to Himself, identifying Himself with us. Then we have, just as distinctly, Christ, by the use of this name, in a very real sense distinguishing Himself from us, and claiming to hold a unique and solitary relation to mankind. And then we have Christ, by the use of this name in its connection with the ancient prophecy, pointing us onward to a wonderful future.

I.—First then, Christ thereby identifies Himself with us. The name Son of Man, whatever more it means, declares the historical fact of His Incarnation and the reality and genuineness, the completeness and fulness of His assumption of humanity. And so it is significant to notice that the name is employed continually in the places in Scripture where especial emphasis is to be placed, for some reason or other, upon our Lord's manhood. As for instance when He would bring into view the depth of His humiliation. It is this name that He uses when He says: "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." The use of the term there is very significant and profound; He contrasts His homelessness, not with the homes of men that dwell in palaces, but with the homes of the inferior creatures. As if He would say, "Not merely am I individually homeless and shelterless, but I am so because I am truly a man, the only creature that builds houses, and the only creature that has not a home. Foxes have holes, anywhere they can rest, the birds of the air have"—not as our Bible gives it—"nests," but "roosting places; any bough will do for them. All living creatures are at home in this material universe; I, as a Representative of humanity, wander a pilgrim and a sojourner." We are all restless and homeless; the creatures correspond to their environment. We have desires and longings, wild yearnings, and deep-seated needs, that "wander through eternity;" the Son of Man, the representative of manhood — "hath not where to lay His head."

Then the same expression is employed on occasions when our Lord desires to emphasise the completeness of His participation in all our conditions. As, for instance, "the Son of Man came eating and drinking," knowing the ordinary limitations and necessities of corporeal humanity ; having the ordinary dependence upon external things ; nor unwilling to taste, with pure and thankful lip, whatever gladnesses may be found in man's path through the supply of natural appetites.

And the name is employed habitually on occasions when He desires to emphasise His manhood as having truly taken upon itself the whole weight and weariness of man's sin, and the whole burden of man's guilt, and the whole tragicalness of the penalties thereof. As in the familiar passages, so numerous that I need only refer to them and need not attempt to quote them, in which we read of the Son of Man being betrayed into the hands of sinners ; in those words, for instance, which so marvellously blend the lowliness of the Man and the lofty consciousness of the mysterious relation which He bears to the whole world : "The Son of Man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for the many."

Now if we gather all these instances (and they are only specimens culled almost at random) together, and meditate for a moment on the name as illuminated by such words as these, they suggest to us, first, how truly and how blessedly He is "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh." All our human joys were His. He knew all human sorrow. The ordinary wants of human nature belonged to Him ; He hungered, He thirsted and was weary ; He ate and drank and slept. The ordinary wants of the human heart He knew :—He was hurt by hatred, stung by ingratitude, yearned for love ; His spirit expanded amongst friends and was pained when they fell away. He fought and toiled, and sorrowed and enjoyed. He had to pray, to trust and to weep. He was a Son of Man, a true man among men. His life was brief; we have but fragmentary records of it for three short years. In outward form it covers but a narrow area of human experience, and large tracts of human life seem to be unrepresented in it. Yet all ages and classes of men, in all circumstances, however unlike those of the peasant Rabbi who died when He was just entering mature manhood, may feel that this Man comes closer to them than all beside. Whether for stimulus for duty, or for grace and patience in sorrow, or for restraint in enjoyment, or for the hallowing of all circumstances and all tasks, the presence and example of the Son of Man are sufficient. Wherever we go, we may track His footsteps by the drops of His blood upon the sharp flints that we have to tread. In all narrow passes, where the briars tear the wool of the flock, we may see, left there on the thorns, what they rent from the pure fleece of the Lamb of God that went before. The Son of Man is our Brother and our Example.

And is it not beautiful, and does it not speak to us touchingly and sweetly of our Lord's earnest desire to get very near us and to bring us very near to Him, that this name, which emphasises humiliation and weakness, and the likeness to ourselves, should be the name that is always upon His lips? Just as, if I may compare great things with small, some teacher or philanthropist that went away from civilised into savage life, might leave behind him the name by which he was known in Europe, and adopt some barbarous designation that was significant in the language of the savage tribe to whom he was sent, and say to them "That is my name now, call me by that": —so this great Leader of our souls that has landed upon our coasts with His hands full of blessings, His heart full of love, has taken a name that makes Him one of ourselves, and is never wearied of speaking to our hearts and telling us that it is that by which He chooses to be known. It is a touch of the same infinite condescension which prompted His coming, that makes Him choose as His favourite and habitual designation the name of weakness and identification, the name "Son of Man."

II.—But, now, turn to what is equally distinct and clear in this title. Here we have our Lord distinguishing Himself from us, and plainly claiming an unique relationship to the whole world.

Just fancy how absurd it would be for one of us to be perpetually insisting on the fact that he was a man, to be taking that as his continual description of himself, and pressing it upon people's attention as if there was something strange about it! The idea is preposterous; and the very frequency and emphasis with which the name comes from our Lord's lips lead one to suspect that there is something lying behind it more than appears on the surface. That impression is confirmed and made a conviction if you mark the article which is prefixed, *the* Son of Man. *A* son of man is a very different idea. When He says "*the* Son of Man" He seems to declare that in Himself there are gathered up all the qualities that constitute humanity; that He is, to use modern language, the realised Ideal of manhood, the typical Man, in Whom is everything that belongs to manhood, and Who stands forth as complete and perfect.

Appropriately, then, the name is continually used with suggestions of authority and dignity contrasting with those of humiliation. "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins," and the like. So that you cannot get away from this, that this Man Whom the whole world has conspired to profess to admire for His gentleness, and His meekness, and His lowliness, and His religious sanity, stood forward and said: "I am complete and perfect, and everything that belongs to manhood you will find in Me."

And it is very significant in this connection that the designation occurs more frequently in the first three Gospels than in the fourth; which is alleged to present higher notions of the nature and personality of Jesus Christ than are found in the other three. There are more instances in Matthew's Gospel in which our Lord calls Himself the Son of Man, with all the implication of uniqueness and completeness which that name carries, there are more even in the Gospel of the Servant—the Gospel according to Mark—than in the Gospel of the Word of God, the Gospel according to John. And so I think we are entitled to say that by this name, which the testimony of all four Gospels makes it certain, even to the most suspicious reader, that Christ applied to Himself, He declared His humanity, His absolutely perfect and complete humanity.

In substance He is claiming the same thing for Himself that Paul claimed for Him when he called Him the second Adam. There have been two men in the world, says Paul, the fallen Adam, with his infantile and undeveloped perfections, and the Christ, with His full and complete humanity. All other men are fragments, He is the "entire and perfect chrysolite." As one of our epigrammatic seventeenth century divines has it, "Aristotle is but the rubbish of an Adam," and Adam is but the dim outline sketch of a Jesus. Between these two there have been none. The one Man as God meant him, the type of man, the perfect humanity, the realised ideal, the home of all the powers of manhood, is He who Himself claimed that place for Himself, and stepped into it with the strange words upon His lips—"I am meek and lowly of heart."

"Who is this Son of Man?" Ah! brethren, "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." A perfect Son of Man, born of a woman, "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," must be more than a Son of Man. And that moral completeness and that ideal perfection in all the faculties and parts of His nature which drove the betrayer to clash down the thirty pieces of silver in the sanctuary in despair that "he had betrayed innocent blood;" which made Pilate wash his hands "of the blood of this just person;" which stopped the mouths of the adversaries when He challenged them to convince Him of sin, and which all the world ever since has recognised and honoured, ought surely to lead us to ask the question, "Who is this Son of Man?" and to answer it, as I pray we all may answer it, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

This fact of absolute completeness invests His work with an altogether unique relationship to the rest of mankind. And so we find the name employed upon His own lips in connections in which He desires to set Himself forth as the single and solitary medium of all blessing and salvation to the world. As for instance, "The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for the many;" "Ye shall see the Heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." He is what the ladder was in the vision to the patriarch, with his head upon the stone and the Syrian sky over him—the Medium of all communication between earth and Heaven. And that ladder which joins Heaven to earth, and brings all angel down on the solitary watchers comes straight down, as the sunbeams do, to every man wherever he is. Each of us sees the shortest line from his own standing place to the central light, and its beams come straight to the apple of each man's eye. So because Christ is more than a man, because He is *the* Man, His blessings come to each of us direct and straight, as if they had been launched from the throne with a purpose and a message to us alone. Thus He who is in Himself perfect manhood touches all men, and all men touch Him, and the Son of Man, whom God hath sealed, will give to every one of us the bread from heaven. The unique relationship which brings Him into connection with every soul of man upon earth, and makes Him the Saviour, Helper, and Friend of us all, is expressed when He calls Himself the Son of Man.

III.—And now one last word in regard to the predictive character of this designation. Even if we cannot regard it as being actually a quotation of the prophecy in the Book of Daniel, there is an evident allusion to that prophecy, and to the whole circle of ideas presented by it of an everlasting dominion, which shall destroy all antagonistic power, and of a solemn coming for judgment of one like a Son of Man.

We find, then, the name occurring on our Lord's lips very frequently in that class of passages with which we are so familiar; and which are so numerous that I need not quote them to you; in which he speaks of the second coming of the Son of Man. As, for instance, that one which connects itself most distinctly with the Book of Daniel, the words of high solemn import before the tribunal of the High Priest. "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the glories of heaven." Or, as when He says, "He hath given Him authority to execute judgment also because He is the Son of Man." Or as when the proto-martyr, with his last words, declared in sudden burst of surprise and thrill of gladness, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

Two thoughts are all that I can touch on here. The name carries with it a blessed message of the present activity and perpetual manhood of the risen Lord. Stephen does not see Him as all the rest of Scripture paints Him, *sitting* at the right hand of God, but *standing* there. The emblem of His sitting at the right hand of God represents triumphant calmness in the undisturbed confidence of victory. It declares the completeness of the work that He has done upon earth, and that all the history of the future is but the unfolding of the consequences of that work which by His own testimony was finished when He bowed His head and died. But the dying martyr sees Him *standing*, as if He had sprung to His feet in response to the cry of faith from the first of the long train of sufferers. As if the Emperor upon His seat, looking down upon the arena where the gladiators are contending to the death, could not sit quiet amongst the flashing axes of the lictors and the purple curtains of His throne, and see their death-struggles, but must spring to His feet to help them; or at least bend down with the look and with the reality of sympathy. So Christ, the Son of Man, bearing His manhood with Him,

> "Still bends on earth a brother's eye;"

and is the ever-present Helper of all struggling souls that put their trust in Him.

Then as to the other and main thought here in view—the second coming of that perfect Manhood to be our Judge. It is too solemn a subject for human lips to say much about. It has been vulgarised, and the power taken out of it by many well-meant attempts to impress it upon men's hearts. But that *coming is certain.* That manhood could not end its relationship to us with the Cross, nor yet with the slow, solemn, upward progress which bore Him, pouring down blessings, up into the same bright cloud that had dwelt between the cherubim and had received Him into its mysterious recesses at the Transfiguration. That He should come again is the only possible completion of His work.

That Judge is our brother. So in the deepest sense we are tried by our Peer. Man's knowledge at its highest cannot tell the moral desert of anything that any man does. You may judge action, you may sentence for breaches of law, you may declare a man clear of any blame for such, but for any man to read the secrets of another man's heart is beyond human power; and if he were only a man that is the Judge there will be wild work, and many a blunder in the sentences that are given. But when we think that it is the Son of Man that is our Judge, then we know that the Omniscience of Divinity, that ponders the hearts and reads the motives, will be all blended with the tenderness and sympathy of Humanity; that we shall be judged by One who knows all our frame, not only with the knowledge of a Maker, if I may so say, as from outside, but with the knowledge of a possessor, as from within; that we shall be judged by One who has fought and conquered in all temptations; and most blessed of all, that we shall be judged by One with whom we have only to plead His own work and His own love and His Cross that we may stand acquitted before His throne.

So, brethren, in that one mighty name all the past, present, and future are gathered and blended together. In the past His Cross fills the retrospect: for the future there rises up white and solemn, His Judgment throne. "The Son of Man *is* come to give His life a ransom for the many." That is the centre point of all history. The Son of man *shall* come to judge the world. That is the one thought that fills the future. Let us lay hold by true faith on the mighty work which He has done on the Cross, then we shall rejoice to see our Brother on the throne, when the "judgment is set and the books are opened." Oh, friends, cleave to Him ever in trust and love, in communion and imitation, in obedience and confession, that ye may be accounted worthy "to stand before the Son of Man" in that day.

TWO FORTRESSES.

SERMON XXIII.

TWO FORTRESSES.

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own conceit." Proverbs xviii. 10, 11.

THE mere reading of these two verses shows that, contrary to the usual rule in the Book of Proverbs, they have a bearing on each other. They are intended to suggest a very strong contrast, and that contrast is even more emphatic in the original than in our translation; because, as the margin of your Bibles will tell you, the last word of the former verse might be more correctly rendered, "the righteous runneth into it and is *set on high.*" It is the same word which is employed in the next verse:—"a high wall."

So we have "the strong tower" and "the strong city"; the man lifted up above danger on the battlements of the one, and the man fancying himself to be high above it, (and only fancying himself) in the imaginary safety of the other.

I.—Consider then, first, the two fortresses.

One need only name them side by side to feel the full force of the intended contrast. On the one hand, the Name of the Lord with all its depths and glories, with its blaze of lustrous purity, and infinitudes of inexhaustible power; and on the other, "the rich man's wealth." What contempt is expressed in putting the two side by side! It is as if the author had said, Look on this picture and on this! Two fortresses! Yes! The one is like Gibraltar, inexpugnable on its rock, and the other is like a painted castle on the stage; flimsy canvas that you could put your foot through, solidity by the side of nothingness. For even the poor appearance of solidity is an illusion, as our text says with bitter emphasis, "a high wall *in his own conceit.*"

"The name of the Lord," of course, is the Biblical expression for the whole character of God, as He has made it known to us, or in other words, for God Himself, as He has been pleased to reveal Himself to mankind. The syllables of that name are all the deeds by which He has taught us what He is; every act of power, of wisdom, of tenderness, of grace that has manifested these qualities and led us to believe that they are all infinite. In the name, in its narrower sense, the name of *Jehovah*, there is much of "the name" in its wider sense. For that name "Jehovah," both by its signification and by the circumstances under which it was originally employed, tells us a great deal about God. It tells us, for instance, by virtue of its signification, that He is self-existent, depending upon no other creature. "I AM THAT I AM!" No other being can say that. All the rest of us have to say, "I am that which God made me." Circumstances and a hundred other things have made me; God finds the law of His being and the fountain of His being within Himself.

> "He sits on no precarious throne,
> Nor borrows leave to be."

His name proclaims Him to be self-existent, and as self-existent, eternal; and as eternal, changeless; and as self-existent, eternal, changeless, infinite in all the qualities by which He makes Himself known. This boundless Being, all full of wisdom, power, and tenderness; with Whom we can enter into relations of amity and concord, surely He is "a strong Tower into which we may run and be safe."

But far beyond even the sweep of that great name, Jehovah, is the knowledge of God's deepest heart and character which we learn in Him who said "I have declared Thy name unto My brethren, and will declare it." Christ in His life and death, in His meekness, sweetness, gentleness, calm wisdom, infinite patience, attractiveness; yearning over sinful hearts, weeping over rebels, in the graciousness of His life, in the sacredness and the power of His Cross, is the Revealer to our hearts of the heart of God. If I may so say, He has builded "the strong tower" broader, has expanded its area and widened its gate, and lifted its summit yet nearer the heavens, and made the name of God a wider name and a mightier name, and a name of surer defence and blessing than ever it was before.

And so, dear brethren, it all comes to this, the name that is "the strong tower" is the name "My Father!" a Father of infinite tenderness, and wisdom, and power. Oh! where can the child rest more quietly than on the mother's breast, where can the child be safer than in the circle of the father's arms? "The name of the Lord is a strong tower."

Now turn to the other for a moment:—"The rich man's wealth is" (with great emphasis on the next little word) "*his* strong city, and as a high wall in his own conceit." Of course we have not to deal here only with wealth in the shape of money, but all external and material goods, the whole mass of the things seen and temporal are gathered together here in this phrase.

Men use their imaginations in very strange fashion, and make, or fancy they make, for themselves out of the things of the present life a defence and a strength. Like some poor lunatic, out upon a moor, that fancies himself ensconced in a castle ; like some barbarous tribes behind their stockades or crowding at the back of a little turf wall, or in some old tumble-down fort that the first shot will bring rattling about their ears, fancying themselves perfectly secure and defended,—so do men deal with these outward things that are given them for another purpose altogether : they make of them defences and fortresses.

It is difficult for a man to have them and not to trust them. So Jesus said to His disciples once :—"How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom ; and when they were astonished at His words, He repeated them with the significant variation, "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God." So He would teach that the misuse and not the possession of wealth is the barrier, but so, too, He would warn us that, nine times out of ten, the possession of them in more than a very modest measure, tempts a man into confidence in them.

The illusion is one that besets us all. We are all tempted to make a defence of the things that we can see and handle. Is it not strange, and is it not sad, that most of us just turn the truth round about and suppose that the real defence is the imaginary, and that the imaginary one is the real ? How many men are there in this chapel, that, if they spoke out their deepest convictions would say :—"Oh yes ! the promises of God are all very well, but I would rather have the cash down. I suppose that I may trust that He will provide bread and water, and all the things that I need, but I would rather have a good solid balance at the banker's." How many of you would rather honestly, and at the bottom of your hearts, have that than God's word for your defence? How many of you think that to trust in a living God is but grasping at a very airy and unsubstantial kind of support; and that the real solid defence is the defence made of the things that you can see?

My brother! it is exactly the opposite way. Turn it clean round, and you get the truth. The unsubstantial shadows are the material things that you can see and handle; illusory as a dream, and as little able to ward off the blows of fate as a soap bubble. The Real is the Unseen beyond, "the things that *are*," and He who alone really is, and in His boundless and absolute Being is our only defence.

In one aspect or another, that false imagination with which my last text deals is the besetting sin of Manchester. Not the rich man only, but the poor man just as much, is in danger of it. The poor man who thinks that everything would be right if only he were rich, and the rich man who thinks that everything is right because he *is* rich,—are exactly the same man. The circumstances differ, but the one man is but the other turned inside out. And all round about us we see the fierce fight to get more and more of these things, the tight grip of them when we have got them, the over-estimate of the value of them, the contempt for the people that have less of them than ourselves. Our aristocracy is an aristocracy of wealth; in some respects, one by no means to be despised, because there often go a great many good qualities to the making and the stewardship of wealth; but still it is an evil that men should be so largely estimated by their money as they are here. It is not a sound state of opinion which has made, "what is he *worth?*" mean "how much of *it* has he?" We are taught here to look upon the prizes of life as being mainly wealth. To win that is "success"—"prosperity"—and it is very hard for us all not to be influenced by the prevailing tone.

I would urge you, young men, especially to lay this to heart—that of all delusions that can beset you in your course, none will work more disastrously than the notion that the *summum bonum*, the shield and stay of a man, is the abundance of the things that he possesses. I fancy I see more listless, discontented, unhappy faces looking out of carriages than I see upon the pavement. And I am sure of this, at any rate, that all which is noble and sweet and good in life can be wrought out and possessed, upon as much bread and water as will keep body and soul together, and as much furniture as will enable a man to sit at his meal and lie down at night. And as for the rest, it has many advantages and blessings, but oh! it is all illusory as a defence against the evils that will come, sooner or later, to every life.

II.—Consider next how to get into the true refuge.

"The righteous runneth into it and is safe," says my text. You may get into the illusory one very easily Imagination will take you there. There is no difficulty at all about that. And yet the way by which a man makes this world his defence may teach you a lesson as to how you can make God your defence. How *does* a man make this world his defence? By trusting to it. He that says to the fine gold, "Thou art my confidence," has made it his fortress—and that is how you will make God your fortress—by trusting to *Him*. The very same emotion, the very same act of mind, heart, and will, may be turned either upwards or downwards, as you can turn the beam from a lantern which way you please. Direct it earthwards, and you "trust in the uncertainty of riches." Flash it heavenwards, and you "trust in the living God."

And that same lesson is taught by the words of our text: "The righteous runneth into it." I do not dwell upon that word "righteous." That is the Old Testament point of view, which could not conceive it possible that any man could have deep and close communion with God, except on condition of a pure character. I will not speak of that at present, but point to the picturesque metaphor, which will tell us a great deal more about what faith is than many a philosophical dissertation. Many a man who would be perplexed by a theologian's talk will understand this: "The righteous runneth into the name of the Lord."

The metaphor brings out the idea of eager haste in betaking oneself to the shelter, as when an invading army comes into a country, and the unarmed peasants take their portable belongings and their cattle, and catch up their children in their arms, and set their wives upon their mules, and make all haste to some fortified place; or as when the manslayer in Israel fled to the city of refuge, or as when Lot hurried for his life out of Sodom. There would be no dawdling then: but with every muscle strained, men would run into the stronghold, counting every minute a year till they were inside its walls, and heard the heavy door close between them and the pursuer. No matter how rough the road, or how over-powering the heat. No time to stop to gather flowers, or even diamonds on the road, when a moment's delay might mean the enemy's sword in your heart!

Now that metaphor is frequently used to express the resolved and swift act by which, recognising in Jesus Christ, who declares the name of the Lord, our hiding-place, we shelter ourselves in Him, and rest secure. One of the picturesque words by which the Old Testament expresses "trust" means literally "to flee to a refuge." The Old Testament *trust* is the New Testament *faith*, even as the Old Testament "*Name of the Lord*" answers to the New Testament "*Name of Jesus*." And so we run into this sure hiding-place and strong fortress of the name of the Lord, when we betake ourselves to Jesus and put our trust in Him as our defence.

Such a faith—the trust of mind, heart, and will—laying hold of the name of the Lord, makes us "righteous," and so capable of "dwelling with the devouring fire" of God's perfect purity. The Old Testament point of view was righteousness, in order to abiding in God. The New Testament begins, as it were, at an earlier stage in the religious life, and tells us how to get the righteousness, without which, it holds as strongly as the Old Testament, no man shall see the Lord. It shows us that our faith, by which we run into that fortress, fits us to enter the fortress, because it makes us partakers of Christ's purity.

So my earnest question to you all is—Have you "fled for refuge to lay hold" on that Saviour in whom God has set His name? Like Lot out of Sodom, like the manslayer to the city of refuge, like the unwarlike peasants to the baron's tower, before the border thieves, have you gone thither for shelter from all the sorrows and guilt and dangers that are marching terrible against you? Can you take up as yours the old grand words of exuberant trust in which the Psalmist heaps together the names of the Lord as if walking about the city of his defence, and telling the towers thereof? "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." If you have, then "because you have made the Lord your refuge, there shall no evil befall you."

III.—So we have, lastly, what comes of sheltering in these two refuges.

As to the former of them, I said at the beginning of these remarks that the words "is safe" were more accurately as well as picturesquely rendered by is "set aloft." They remind us of the psalm which has many points of resemblance with this text, and which gives the very same thought when it says "I will set him on high, because he hath known My name." The fugitive is taken within the safe walls of the strong tower, and is set up high on the battlements, looking down upon the baffled pursuers, and far beyond the reach of their arrows. To stand upon that tower lifts a man above the region where temptations fly, above the region where sorrow strikes, lifts him above sin and guilt and condemnation, and fear, and calumny, and slander and sickness, and separation, and loneliness, and death ; "and all the ills that flesh is heir to."

Or, as one of the old Puritan commentators has it :—"The tower is so deep that no pioneer can undermine it, so thick that no cannon can breach it, so high that no ladder can scale it." "The righteous runneth into it," and is perched up there ; and can look down like Lear from his cliff, and all the troubles that afflict the lower levels shall "show scarce so gross as beetles" from the height where he stands, safe and high, hidden in the Name of the Lord.

I say little about the other side. Brethren, the world in any of its forms, the good things of this life in any shape, whether that of money or any other, can do a great deal for us. They can keep a great many inconveniences from us, they can keep a great many cares and pains and sorrows from us. I was going to say, to carry out the metaphor, they can keep the rifle bullets from us. But, ah ! when the big siege guns get into position and begin to play ; when the great trials that every life must have, sooner or later, come to open fire at us, then the defence that anything in this outer world can give comes rattling about our ears very quickly. It is like the pasteboard helmet which looked as good as if it had been steel, and did admirably as long as no sword struck it.

There is only one thing that will keep us peaceful and unharmed, and that is to trust our poor shelterless lives and sinful souls to the Saviour who has died for us. In

Him we find the hiding-place in which secure, as beneath the shadow of a great rock, dreaded evils will pass us by, as impotent to hurt as savages before a castle fortified by modern skill. All the bitterness of outward calamities will be taken from them before they reach us. Their arrows will still wound, but He will have wiped the poison off before He lets them be shot at us. The force of temptation will be weakened, for if we live near Him we shall have other tastes and desires. The bony fingers of the skeleton death, that drags men from all other homes, will not dislodge us from our fortress-dwelling. Hid in Him we shall neither fear going down to the grave, nor coming up from it, nor judgment, nor eternity. Then, I beseech you, make no delay. Escape, flee for your life. A growing host of evil marches swift against you. Take Christ for your defence and cry to Him,

"Lo! from sin and grief and shame,
Hide me, Jesus, in Thy name."

A LIVING SACRIFICE.

SERMON XXIV.

A LIVING SACRIFICE.

"I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, **that ye present your** bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Romans xii. 1.

THIS verse makes a transition from the first to the second half of this letter. All before it is what we call doctrinal, the most of what comes after it is practical. And the "therefore" of my text carries us back, not merely to the words immediately preceding, but to the whole presentation of the Christian scheme of salvation from the beginning of the Epistle up to the present point. That is to say, in Paul's notion, all the practical is to be built upon all the doctrinal. There are many men that say: "Give us the morality of the New Testament; never mind about the theology." But you cannot get the morality without the theology, unless you like to have rootless flowers and lamps without oil. If you want men to live as Paul enjoins, you will have to get them to yield to the mercies of God, which Paul pleads as the motive for all holy life.

And, on the other hand, a great many good people, and some professed theologians and Christian ministers forget that the end of doctrine is life, and that the meaning of all that we are taught about God is conduct and character, and that therefore the most orthodox orthodoxy, divorced from practice, is like the dried flowers which botanists put between sheets of blotting-paper, with no perfume nor colour, nor growth nor life in them—the skeletons of dead beauty.

Let us, then, always remember this little word "therefore" that binds together indissolubly the two halves of Christian teaching—the setting forth of Christian truth, and the earnest exhortation—built upon that truth—to all manner of Christian duty.

These words of my text are not only the flower and the outcome of all that has gone before, but they are likewise the basis of all that follows. The whole of the detailed exhortations which fill up the rest of the Epistle lie, as the folded leaves in the spring time in the sheath-like bud, here in this exhortation. The two precepts of this verse, and of the one that follows it, give us, in the most general terms, the highest notion of Christian morality and duty. Sacrifice and transformation, these two, if you will analyse and expand them, you will find to lead up to all manner of nobilities and heroisms and holinesses, of life and conduct.

I.—So then, we have here, I think, in our text a very remarkable way of putting what I may call the sum of Christian service.

"I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies"—"present," of course, being the sacrificial word for bringing the offering—"a *living* sacrifice"; not dragged dead to the altar, but living when brought there; and living because brought there; "holy" with a true consecration because it *is* a sacrifice, and, wonderful to think, "acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service." Now the main leading idea there is, as I said, the gathering together of all Christian duty into the one mighty word "sacrifice." And what does that mean? It means, no mere fine metaphor, but a thought that has a very wide sweep, and a very tight application to our daily lives.

Sacrifice, to begin with, means giving up everything to God. And how do I give up to God? When in heart and will, and thought, I am conscious of His presence, and do all the actions of the inner man in dependence on and in obedience to Him. That is the true sacrifice, when I think as in His sight, and will, and love, and act as in obedience to Him.

And this sacrifice, which consists in the reference of the whole of my being and actions to God, will, as it were, becoming visible in the sacrifice of the body which is the manifestation of the inner man. That word is not to be passed over as if it were only a synonym for "yourselves." My text speaks about what is to be done with the body; the next verse speaks about what is to be done with the mind.

"Present your bodies living sacrifices." We are to look upon our corporeal frame with reverence as the gift of God. We are to look upon it and to use it as a wonderful instrument, and to keep it well in hand as a possible enemy and antagonist. The body is the organ of all our activity, that by which we come into communication with the outer world; and we render it up as a living sacrifice to God when in all common actions we have a supreme and distinct reference to His will, and do, or refuse to do, because of the fear and for the sake of the Lord. As one of the Greek commentators has it upon this verse :—"Let the eye look upon nothing evil, and it becomes a sacrifice; let the tongue say nothing foul, and it becomes an offering; let the hand do nothing unlawful, and it becomes a holocaust." The body has wants and appetites—food, drink, clothing, shelter, rest, recreation; you have to see to it that these are supplied with a distinct reference to, and remembrance of, Him, the Creator and Saviour of the body, and so made acts of religious worship.

The excess which dulls the spirit and makes it all unapt to serve Him, and to walk in the lofty regions of truth, and to cultivate the habit of meditation; the absorbing care about outward things which checks all the nobility of a man's life; the mere selfish indulgence and enjoyment in them which brings men below the level of the beasts that perish, these are the grosser forms in which the body comes in the way of the soul, and the regulation and suppression of these are the elementary and simplest parts of the offering of our bodies as living sacrifices. We should neither care so much as some of you men do for what you eat and drink, nor so much as some of you women do for the wherewithal you shall be clothed; but consult for these needs and satisfy them as in the sight of God, and so realise that high and difficult attainment of Christian godliness, to "eat our meat with thankfulness and with singleness of heart, praising God."

It is not fitting in this place (though I would fain do it for some reasons), to dwell on some of the grosser forms in which this great exhortation is neglected, especially by some of you younger men. Let me but hint at what I cannot do more than hint here. Remember, my young brother, "He that soweth to the flesh shall"—as sure as one and one make two: he shall—"of the flesh reap corruption." Remember your body is the temple of a spirit which may be the temple of a living God, and "live soberly" in this present world of evil.

There is no need in this generation to preach against asceticism. We are too good Protestants, that is to say, many of us are too fond of our own self-indulgence to fall into any danger of fasting and hair-shirts. All that kind of life was an extreme, unquestionably; and the kind of life that a great many of you professing Christians live is an extreme the other way, just as unquestionably. And looking at the two, the man that mortified his body in the monk's cell, and the "liberal-minded" professing Christian that never thinks of curbing his animal gratifications, or of eating and drinking as in the fear of God, I for my part would rather, of the two, be the monk. I am quite sure that there never was a generation that wanted this exhortation more than this generation does, when all round about us we see senseless luxury, the making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof in all classes of life, when "plain and high thinking" are no more; when you cannot look at the hoardings on the walls without having your eyes offended and your decency insulted; when poetry, painting and sculpture, and the stage, and the newspapers, seem all to vie one with another to feed the flesh, and to proclaim a crusade against the subjugation of the body for the sake of the spirit; and when young men and old men, young women and old women, professing Christians and non-Christians, are alike in danger of being tainted by the leprosy. My brother, I bring you the old message. Better John the Baptist's garment of camel's hair and his meat—locusts and wild honey, if, like John the Baptist, I shall see the heavens opened, and the Spirit of God descending on the Son of Man, than this full-fed sensualism which is the curse and the crime of this generation. "I beseech you, brethren, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice."

Now a word or two about other matters connected with this first thought as to the sum of Christian service. Here we get this truth that such offering makes a man live more nobly and more truly than anything else.

"A living sacrifice." Of course that refers to the contrast between the death of the sacrifice, in Judaism and Heathenism, and the life of the man in the Christian sacrifice. But it carries with it this lesson, too, that, not mutilation but consecration is the true sacrifice; that we are not called upon to crush our desires, tastes, appetites, or to refrain from actions, but that they are to be controlled and done in obedience to God.

Now and then it may be necessary, it very often is necessary, that a man should offer his body a living sacrifice in the sense of giving up, and altogether crucifying and contradicting some natural taste and desire. As Christ tells us, circumstances may come in which it is the plain dictate of Christian duty to put your hand down there on the block and take an axe in the other and chop it off. It is the best thing you can do; better for you to go maimed into life than with all your limbs into hell. But that is second-best; and if the man had always consecrated his faculty to God, he would never have had need to cut it off. To harness and tame it, to yoke it to the cart, and make it work, not to shoot the wild beast, is the right thing to do.

Thus to consecrate oneself is the way to secure a higher and a nobler life than ever before. Just as when you take a flower out of the woods and put it into a greenhouse, and cultivate, and keep it back, and nip off some of its flower buds, and guide its growth, you will get a broader leaf and a finer flower than when it was wild, so the disciplined, restrained, consecrated man is the man whose life is the richest, fullest, largest, the gladsomest, the noblest in every way. If you want to go all to rack and ruin live according to your own fancy and taste. If you want to be strong and grow stronger and more and more blessed, put the brake on and keep a tight hand upon yourself, and offer your whole being upon His altar.

Then, again, this sacrifice is "your reasonable service."

Apparently "reasonable" here is not opposed to "unreasonable"; Paul would not have called the Jewish sacrifices unreasonable, nor did it lie in his way here to assert that the Christian sacrifice was in accordance with reason—however true that may be. But the antithesis is with the material sacrifices consisting of the "flesh of bulls" and "blood of goats," and the Revised Version gives the true meaning in its marginal rendering "spiritual." It is a service or worship rendered by the inner man, transacted by the mind or reason, and thus, as indicating the part of our nature which performs it, is reasonable. For though the body be the sacrifice, presenting the body as sacrifice is the work of the mind and will, and while the offering is a corporeal, bringing the offering is a spiritual service.

Now there is no need to exaggerate in depreciation of outward forms of oral worship. But still we have all need to be reminded that devout daily living is true worship. All Christians are priests, and all their lives should be worship. Where the common food is eaten with thankfulness and in the consciousness of His presence, it is holy as the Lord's Supper. The same authority that said of the one "This do in remembrance of Me," said by His Apostle of the other "Whether ye eat or drink, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." *Laborare est orare*—to work is to pray, if the work be done from a right motive. The bells that jingle on the horses in the waggoner's team may bear the same inscription as blazed on the High Priest's mitre, "Holiness to the Lord," and the shop-girl behind the counter may be as truly offering sacrifice to God as the priest by the altar. The mere formal worship is abomination without this. "When ye make many prayers, I will not hear you; your hands are full of blood." "Do you think that you are going to lift them to My Throne with acceptance?" Is there not every bit as much superstitious dependence on forms and places of external worship amongst us nineteenth-century Nonconformists as ever there was at any time in the world's history? There are people in this chapel this morning that think they have done a meritorious thing in coming here to this service, and whose only notion of worship is a weary sitting in this place for an hour and a half. Do you think that is of any use? Your prayers will never go above that roof, and no blessings will ever come down through it to you, unless the worship of the Word be purified and proved by the worship of the Life. The sacrifice of praise is right, "but to do good and to communicate forget not, for with *such* sacrifices God is well pleased."

II.—We have not only the sum of Christian service, but we have likewise the great motive of Christian service. "I beseech you, therefore, by the mercies of God." In the Apostle's mind this is no vague expression for the whole of the diffused blessings with which God floods the world, but he means thereby the definite specific thing, the great scheme of mercy set forth in the previous chapters; that is to say, His great work of saving the world through Jesus Christ. That is, "the mercies" to which he makes his appeal. The diffused and wide-shining mercies, which stream from the Father's heart, are all, as it were, focussed as through a burning-glass into one strong beam, which can kindle the greenest wood and melt the thick-ribbed ice.

Only on the footing of that sacrifice can we offer ours. He has offered the one sacrifice, of which His death is the essential part, in order that we may offer the sacrifice of which our life is the essential part. He has offered the dying sacrifice which is propitiation, in order that, on the footing of that, we may offer the sacrifice of thankful consecration, the Eucharistic sacrifice of grateful surrender of ourselves to Him.

The mercies of God, in Jesus Christ, are not only the ground upon which we can offer our sacrifice, but they are the only motive power that will be strong enough to lead to this consecration of ourselves to Him. The fierce wants of the bodily life, the passions, and appetites and lusts that rage and rule in men will be subdued by nothing short of the mighty motive drawn from the great love of God revealed in the dying love of Jesus. There is one magnet strong enough to draw reluctant hearts and reluctant limbs, and that is Jesus lifted up on the Cross. There is one fire powerful enough to burn the bonds of flesh and sense which hold men, and that is the fire which Jesus longed to kindle on earth. Other restraints from propriety, prudence, or even principle will reach their breaking point at a much lower strain than the silken bonds in which Christ's love leads the lion and the bear of our passions and appetites. They are useful and helpful in their places—but "Gospel temperance," a self-control based on Christian motives, is the really reliable breakwater against storms and passion and self-indulgence. You may try to coerce the corporeal nature by other bonds, they will be like the fetters upon the madman in the tombs. When the paroxysms come he will rend them asunder as Samson did the withes. Oh, if you want to tame the animal that is in you, and lead it in gentle following and docile obedience, here is the one motive that will do it—the mercy of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. That is one great and blessed peculiarity of Christian morals, that Christ is at once our pattern and our power to copy, and our motive. He is, to those who love Him, both example and stimulus. Let us then seek for power to yield ourselves body and spirit to God, in the habitual contemplation of that great gift which alone will conquer self, and make all surrender and all self-crucifixion blessed and delightsome.

III.—One other thing here I must just touch for a moment, that is the gentle enforcement of this great motive for Christian service, "I beseech you!" Law commands, the Gospel entreats! Paul's beseeching is only a less tender echo of the Master's entreaty. His word to His servants is never "Go," but it is either "Come," or "Who will go?" Thus the harsh imperative of law is softened down by His lips. Instead of "Thou shalt," His most stringent word is; "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." Instead of a harsh injunction, duty becomes the wish of a Friend, which wish is a delight to do. "His yoke is easy," not because His precepts let down the ideal of morality, but because the motive is love, and the manner of command gentle and beseeching. Hence its power; for hearts, like flowers, which could not be burst open by the crowbar of law, may be wooed open by the sunshine of love.

It is a solemn task laid upon us preachers to try to soften our voices that they may not all unworthily represent the gentleness of Christ, and as God's ambassadors, beseech men to be reconciled to God. Through even our lips, dear friends, He "prays you with much entreaty to receive the gift" of Himself, and to render back that gift which it will gladden you to give, and—wonderful condescension—will delight Him to receive—the gift of yourselves. Oh, let that pitying, patient gentle love of the Saviour draw you to Him in contrite faith, and love, and service. He invites, He prays you to let His gracious power enter your heart. From His Cross He called to you and to all the world, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest." Now He speaks from Heaven. "Behold I stand at the door and knock." Surely these beseeching tones should touch your heart more than all thunders of command.

Surely as the morning sunrise drew a note from the stony lips of the statue, which storm and thunder could not awaken, His pleading voice will bring an answer that could not have been won by any commandments, however rigid, or by any threatenings, however severe. "We beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." "Yield yourselves to God as those that are alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness to God," being moved thereto by the mercy of the Cross, and won thereto by the gentle voice of the Saviour of your souls.

WHAT FAITH MAKES OF DEATH.

SERMON XXV.

WHAT FAITH MAKES OF DEATH.*

"An entrance ministered abundantly. Shortly I must put off this my tabernacle. My decease." 2 Peter i. 11, 14, 15.

WE are all mourners here this morning. A life of practical godliness, of bright Christian service, and, latterly, of wonderfully brave endurance, has come at last to the end to which we slowly learned to know it must come. The loving wife, who was a helper and a counsellor as well, the staunch loyal friend, the diligent worker, with her open hand, her frank cordiality, her clear insight, her resolute will, has passed from our sight, but never from our love nor our memory. The empty place in the home can only be filled by Him that has made it empty, and we all pray that He may be near. Every member of this congregation must feel that a strong stay has gone. A wider circle, for whom I may presume to speak, mourns the loss of a dear friend; a far wider one, covering the whole country, offers through my lips this morning affectionate and earnest sympathy to the stricken hearts here to-day.

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* Delivered at Myrtle-street Chapel, Liverpool, (on occasion of the death of Mrs. Stowell Brown.)

But, dear brethren, the pulpit is not the place for personal eulogium, and I think I shall best discharge my duty if I try to turn our common sorrow to account by setting before you some general considerations drawn from these three fragments, which I have ventured to isolate from their connection because they have a certain unity as being all euphemisms for one thing. The Bible very seldom speaks of death by its own ugly name. It rather chooses to use expressions which veil its pain and its terror; and so does common speech. But the reason in the two cases is exactly opposite. The Bible will not call death "death" because it is not a bit afraid of it; the world will not call death "death" because it is so much afraid of it.

The Christian view has robbed it of all its pain and its terror. It has limited its power to the mere outside of the man, and the conviction that death can no more touch me than a sword can hack a sunbeam, reduces it to insignificance. These thoughts are brought out in these fragmentary words which I ask you to consider now. I think you will see that they lend us some very valuable and gladdening thoughts as to the aspect in which Christian faith should regard the act of death.

I have ventured to alter their order for the sake of bringing together the two which are most closely connected.

I.—I ask you, then, to look with me first, at that representation of death as putting off the tabernacle.

"Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Christ hath showed." There is, of course a reference here to the warning which the Apostle received from his Lord, "signifying what death he should die." He had learned that in his old age he should be seized and bound, and led "whither he would not." In all probability the language of our verse would be more accurately represented if we read for "shortly" *suddenly*;—the

Apostle's anticipation not being so much that his dissolution was impending as that his death when it came would be sudden,—that is to say—violent. And therefore he seeks to warn and prepare his brethren beforehand.

The expressions seem to blend the two figures, that of a tabernacle—or tent—and that of a vesture. As the Apostle Paul, in like manner, blends the same two ideas when he talks of being "clothed upon with our house which is from heaven," and unclothed from "our earthly house of this tabernacle."

To such small dimensions has Christian faith dwindled down the ugly thing, death. It has come to be nothing more than a change of vesture, a change of dwelling.

Now what lies in that metaphor? Three things that I touch upon for a moment. First of all the rigid limitation of the region within which death has any power at all. It affects a man's vesture, his dwelling-place, something that belongs to him, something that wraps him, but nothing that is himself. This enemy may seem to come in and capture the whole fortress, but it is only the outworks that are thrown down; the citadel stands. The organ is one thing, the player on it is another; and whatever befalls that has nothing to do with what touches him. Instead of an all-mastering conqueror, then, as sense tells us that death is, and as a great deal of modern science is telling us that death is, it is only a power that touches the fringe and circumference, the wrappage and investiture of my being, and has nothing to do with that being itself. The "foolish senses" may declare that death is lord because they "see no motion in the dead." But in spite of sense and anatomist's scalpels, organisation is not life. Mind and conscience, will and love, are something more than functions of the brain; and no scalpel can ever cut into *self*. I live, and may live—and blessed be God! I can say—*shall* live, apart altogether from this bodily organisation. Whatever befals it is only like changing a dress or removing into another house. The man is untouched.

Another thing implied in this figure, and, indeed, in all three metaphors of our text—is that life runs on unbroken and the same through and after death.

If the Apostle be right in his conviction that the change only affects the circumference, then of course that follows naturally. Unbroken and the same! The gulf looks deep and black to us on this side, but, depend upon it, it looks a mere chink which a step can cross, when seen from the other. Like some of those rivers that disappear in a subterranean tunnel, and then emerge into the light again, the life that sinks out of sight in the dark valley of the shadow of death will come up into a brighter sunshine beyond the mountains, and it will be running in the same direction that it followed when it was lost to mortal eye. For just as the dying Stephen knew his Master again, when he saw Him standing in the glory, we should know our dear ones after they had passed through this change, for all the sweetness and all the love would be there still, and nothing would be gone but the weakness that encompassed them, and the imperfection that sometimes masked their true beauty.

The same in direction, the same in essence, uninterrupted through the midst of the darkness, the life goes on. A man is the same whatever dress he wears. Though we know that much will be changed, and that new powers may come, and old wants and weaknesses fall away with new environment, still the essential self will be unchanged, and the life will run on without a break, and with scarcely a deflection. There is no magic in the act of death which changes the set of a character, or the tendencies and desires of a nature. As you die so you live, and you live in your death and after your death the same man and woman that you were when the blow fell.

So, my brother if you need it, take the warning that lies in this truth, and see to it that the right character is begun to be formed here, for if it be not, there is no power in death to change its direction.

The last idea that is here in this first of our metaphors is that of a step in advance. "I must put off this my tabernacle." Yes! in order that instead of the nomad tent—the ragged canvas—I may put on the building, the permanent house; in order that, instead of the "vesture of decay," I may put on the fine linen, clean and white. which is the righteousness of saints, and the body which is a fit organ for the perfected spirit.

True! that does not come at once, but still the stripping off of the one is the preparation for the investiture with the other; and there is advance in the change. Death is as truly a step forward in a life's history as birth is. Though the full "redemption" of the body be not yet received by them who sleep in Jesus, they wait in peace. They are blessed, conscious, lapped in the rest of God, and surely taught by Him Who knows all things, all that it would gladden or help them to know of us whom they surely love still. They dwell out of the body, but they dwell in the Lord—and He will be to them their means of communication with the outer universe, eyes to the blind and hearing to the deaf.

Of course the process of divesting goes on at different rates. Elijah had his chariot of fire, Elisha is not less favoured when he falls sick of the lingering sickness wherewith he should die. The one has larger means of ministering than the other, and up to the last moment may teach lessons and give impulses. Some have the privilege given them like our dear friend of putting off the garments slowly, and teaching, as she did, lessons of brave patience, and of how to bear pain and weariness with undimmed spirit and unflagging interest in others, which those who learned them will keep as precious memories. But however the end comes, whether the wind rises and beats upon the house, and it falls in one sudden ruin, or whether it is slowly unroofed and dismantled until it is no longer habitable, let us thank God that we know for our dear ones and for ourselves, that whatever becomes of the clay hovel the tenant is safe, and has gone to live in a fair house in a "distant City glorious."

II.—And now we may turn to the remaining two metaphors here, which have a more close connection with each other, and yet are capable of being dealt with separately. Death is further spoken of as a departure.

"I will endeavour," says the Apostle, "that ye may be able after my decease." The word for "decease" here is a very unusual one, as, no doubt, many of you know. It is employed with reference to death only twice in the New Testament, once in the text and once in the account of our Lord's Transfiguration, where Moses and Elias are represented as speaking with Him "of the decease that He should accomplish at Jerusalem." You may observe that immediately after the last of my texts, the Apostle begins to speak about that Transfiguration, and makes definite reference to what he had heard there; so that it is at all events possible that he selects the unusual word with some reference to, or some remembrance of, its use upon that occasion in the narrative of one of the Evangelists. Again, it is the word which has been transferred into English as Exodus, and may possibly be here employed with some allusion to the departure of the children of Israel from the land of bondage. Now, looking at these three points, the literal meaning of this word, its employment in reference to the deliverance from Egypt, and its employment in reference to the death of Christ, we gather from them valuable considerations.

This aspect of death shows it to us as seen from this side. Like the former, it minimises its importance by making it merely a change of place—another stage in a journey. We have had many changes already; only this is the last stage, the last day's march, and it takes us *home.* But yet the sad thoughts of separation and withdrawal are here. These show us the saddest aspect of death, which no reflection and no consolations of religion will ever make less sad. Death, the separator, is, and must always be, an unwelcome messenger. He comes and lays his bony hand upon us, and unties the closest embraces, and draws us away from all the habitudes and associations of our lives, and bans us into a lonely land.

But even in this aspect there is alleviation if we will think about this departure in connection with the two uses of the word which I have mentioned.

A change of place, yes! an Exodus from bondage, as true a deliverance from captivity as that old Exodus was. Life has its chains and limitations, which are largely due to the bodily life hemming in and shackling the spirit. It is a prison house, though it be full of God's goodness. We cannot but feel that, even in health and much more in sickness, the bondage of flesh and sense, of habits rooted in the body, and of wants which it feels, weighs heavily upon us. By one swift stroke of Death's hammer the fetters are struck off. Death is a Liberator, in the profoundest sense; the Moses that leads the bondmen into a desert it may be, but to liberty and towards their own land, to their rest. It is the angel who comes in the night to God's prisoned servant, striking the fetters from his limbs, and leading him through the iron gate into the city. And so we do not need to shiver and fear for ourselves or to mourn for our dear ones, if they have passed out of the bondage of "corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." Death is a departure which is an emancipation.

Again, it is a departure which is conformed to Christ's "decease," and is guided and companioned by Him.

Ah! There you touch the deepest source of all comfort and all strength.

> "We can go through no darker rooms
> Than He has gone before."

And the memory of His presence is comfort and light. What would it be, for instance, to a man stumbling in the polar regions, amidst eternal ice and trackless wastes, to come across the footprints of a man? What would it be if he found out that they were the footprints of his own brother? And you and I have a Brother's steps to tread in when we take that last weary journey from which flesh and sense shrink and fail.

Nor have we only the memory of a past companionship, but, blessed be God! the reality of a present Friend. When all other ties snap, that holds. There is an awful solitude in death into which no human affection can find its way. It comes and wraps a man in a cloud, through which love and sympathy cannot pass, but its thickest and mistiest folds are not too dense for Christ to enter. We may fear when we enter into the cloud; and when our dear ones go into it we may wring our hands in sorrow that our help avails so little, but be sure they have found, and shall find, Christ in the heart of it, and He will say to us, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the floods, they shall not overwhelm thee." The departure is not all pain if we travel in the company of Jesus Christ.

III.—The last aspect of these metaphors is that one contained in the words of our first text, "An entrance ministered abundantly." The going out is a going in; the journey has two ends, only the two ends are so very near each other that the same act is described by the two terms. Looked at from this side it is a going out; looked at from the other side it is a coming in.

"There is but a step betwixt me and *life.*" One moment, whilst we are saying, "Is he gone?" is enough to lead the dying into the presence chamber of the King. To awake is the work of a moment. We but open our eyes, and the realm of dreams falls to pieces and we see realities. One step crosses the frontier.

If I had time I might dwell upon the thought which is plainly taught us in this last of our texts, of the close connection and entire correspondence between the abundance of the entrance and the character of the life. "*So* an entrance says my text, "shall be ministered," and that "so" carries you back to the forcible exhortations in the early part of the chapter. The connection between keeping them and the abundance of "the entrance" is still more emphasised when we know that the same word in a different form occurs in the precept—"*Add* to your faith" and in the promise "An entrance shall be *ministered.*" Which is to say, in other words, if we take care to provide that our faith is enriched and increased with these graces and excellencies of Christian character, then, and then only, shall the abundant entrance be ours.

No question whatever, then, but that there is distinctly laid down here the principle that it is not all the same what *sort* of a Christian a Christian man or woman may be, but that the kind of Christian they are will tell in the kind of entrance they have in the Heaven above.

The smallest faith that unites a man's heart with Jesus Christ makes him capable of receiving so much of salvation as is contained in the bare entrance into the Kingdom; but every degree of faith's increase, and every degree of faith's enrichment makes him more capable of receiving more of God in Christ, and he will get all he can hold. So every deed here on earth of Christian conduct, and every grace here on earth of Christian character, has its issue and its representative in a new influx of the glory and a more intimate possession of the bliss, and a more abundant entrance into the everlasting Kingdom.

■

We all enter at the same gate, but we are set at the banqueting table in due order. We all pass into the same Kingdom, but some of us may at once advance further into the land. Be sure, then, of this, that as our faith is enriched by conduct and character, so our Heaven will be enlarged with raptures and brilliancies.

So, when we see a life of which Christian faith has been the underlying motive, and in which many graces of the Christian character have been plainly manifested, passing from amongst us, let not our love look only at the empty place on earth, but let our faith rise to the thought of the filled place in Heaven. Let us not look down to grave, but up to the skies. Let us not dwell on the departure, but on the abundant entrance. Let us not only remember, but also hope. And as love and faith, memory and hope, follow our friend as she passes "within the veil," let us thank God that we are sure—

> "*She*, when the bridegroom with his feastful friends
> Passes to bliss, at the mid hour of night
> Has gained HER entrance."

My friends ! This day's services speak to each of you. Cannot you hear the "great Voice saying, Come up hither !" Is your life rooted in Jesus Christ ? Have you given your life's service to Him ? Is this world a fleeting show to you because He is the reality that you love and trust ? Is it so ?

If it is, you may be always confident. Life will be full of power for work and gladness. A present Christ will comfort you concerning your dear ones gone ; and when it comes to your turn to go, all the grim features of Death will be softened down into solemn beauty, and he, as God's messenger, will lead you for a moment into the wilderness, and there speak to your heart, and "so an entrance shall be ministered abundantly unto you into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

May it be so with us all ! Amen !

HOW THE LITTLE MAY BE USED TO GET THE GREAT.

SERMON XXVI.

HOW THE LITTLE MAY BE USED TO GET THE GREAT.

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much, and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" Luke xvi. 10-12.

THESE are very revolutionary words in more than one respect. There are two things remarkable about them. One is the contrast which is run in all three verses between what our Lord calls "mammon" (that is, simply outward good) and the inward riches of a heart devoted to, and filled with, God and Christ. The former, the material good, "is that which is least," "unrighteous," "another man's," or leaving out the word "man's," as conveying a false idea—"another's." The inward good is "that which is much," "the true riches," "your own." Christ upsets the world's standard of value as one might do who went among savages whose only medium of currency was cowrie-shells, and putting these aside, let them see gold and silver in the stones that were kicked about by their feet. All that is least in their eyes is greatest, all that is greatest in their eyes is trash.

But another striking thing about the words is the broad, bold statement that a man's use of the lower goods determines, or is at least an element in determining, his possession of the highest. That is a thing that Protestant Christians are shy of saying; they seem to think that somehow or other it militates against the plain teaching of Scripture that *faith* is the condition of salvation. But it is distinctly a part of our Lord's teaching here, and the sooner we make room for it in our creeds the better for our practice and for ourselves.

I.—First, then, I desire to consider briefly that strange, new standard of value which is set up here. On the one side is placed the whole glittering heap of all material good that man can touch or handle, all that wealth can buy of this perishable world; and on the other hand there are the modest and unseen riches of pure thoughts and high desires, of a noble heart, of a life assimilated to Jesus Christ. The two are compared in three points, as to their intrinsic magnitude, as to their quality, as to our ownership of them.

Of the great glittering heap our Lord says: "It is nothing, at its greatest it is small;" and of the other our Lord says: "At its smallest it is great." Just a word or two about these antitheses. "Small" and "great" of course are relative terms; they imply a comparison with each other, and imply also a reference of both to a common standard of value. They not only assert that earth's good is small by the side of, and in comparison with, the other class of good, but they refer both the one and the other class of good to a standard.

And what is the standard? If you have enough of a thing to fill the vessel which is meant to contain it, you will call that quantity great; if not, it will be estimated as little. What are these two classes of good measured by, but their respective power of filling the heart? Outward good at its greatest is small if so measured; inward good at its smallest is great. The smallest soul towers above the biggest fortune. Dives' riches are all too small to satisfy Lazarus. All the wealth of all the Rothschilds is too little to fill the soul of the poorest beggar that stands by their carriage door with hungry eyes. The least degree of truth, of love, of goodness, is bigger in its power to fill the heart than all the externals that human avarice can gather about it.

Now do we believe that? Do we order our lives as if we did believe it? Do we regulate our desires and wishes as if it were an axiom with us that the least of God is more than the most of the world? Can we thus enter into the understanding of Christ's scale and standard, and think of all the external as "That which is least," and of all the inward as "that which is much"?

The world looks at worldly wealth through a microscope which magnifies the infinitesmally small, and then it looks at "the land that is very far off" through a telescope turned the wrong way, which diminishes all that is great. But if we can get up by the side of Jesus Christ and see things with His eyes and from His station, it will be as when a man climbs a mountain, and the little black line, as it seemed to him when looked at from the plain, has risen up into a giant cliff; and all the big things down below, as they seemed when he was among them, have dwindled. That white speck is a palace; that bit of a green patch there, over which the skylark flies in a minute, is a great lord's estate. Oh, dear brethren, we do not need to wait to get to Heaven to learn Heaven's tables of weights and measures! One grain of true love to God is greater in its power to enrich than a California of gold. Manchester men and women, who are tempted to the opposite heresy! do you fix it in your mind that all this visible is trivial, and all the unseen is the great!

Take, again, the second antithesis, the "unrighteous mammon" and "the true riches." That word, "unrighteous" in its application to material good is somewhat difficult. I do not think that it means only a certain class of outward good, namely, that which is unjustly gotten, but that it is the designation of the whole. If we keep strictly to the antithesis, "unrighteous" must be the opposite of "true." The word would then come to mean very nearly the same as *deceitful, that which betrays.* One can see that these two ideas are closely related, and that the meaning of "unrighteous" may easily slide in to that of "deceptive"; and probably it is best to take that as the meaning of the word here. If any one were to contend, however, that the expression pointed to the fact that all material wealth has evil so mixed up with it that though not in itself bad, it leads to all sorts of unrighteousness, so that it may be called in a somewhat popular way of speaking, "the unrighteous mammon," I should not dispute it, though preferring the other sense which makes the word the exact contrast of the *true* riches.

And so we have presented to us the old familiar thought that external good of all sorts looks to be a great deal better than it is. It promises a great many things that it never fulfils, tempting us as a fish is tempted to the hook by a bait which hides the hook. It is "a juggling fiend" that "keeps the word of promise to our ear and breaks it to our hope." No man ever found in any outward good, when he got it, that which he fancied was in it when he was chasing after it. It has always been and ever will be a delusion and a lie to the man that trusts it. But the inward riches of faith, true holiness, lofty aspirations, Christ-directed purposes, all these are true. They promise no more than they perform. They bring more than they said they would. No man ever goes to that well and lets down his bucket and brings it up empty. No man ever leans upon that staff and it breaks beneath his weight

No man ever said :—"I have tasted Thy love, and lo! it does not satisfy me! I have realised Thy help, and lo! it has not been enough!" What we have to say is :—"The little I have tasted rebukes me that I have not longed for and possessed more, for it is sweet beyond all other sweetnesses, and strong beyond all other strengths!" The riches within are "*true* riches." The outward are like the fairy gold in the old legends that is given into a man's palm, and when the morning comes it is a handful of withered beech leaves. You get it and you are not happier than you were before you got it. That is the experience of every man that makes the world his confidence. On one hand is the "unrighteous mammon" that does not keep its promises, that does not deal fairly with the people who give themselves up to it and trust to it; and on the other hand the true riches."

And then the last contrast is between "another's" and "your own." Another's? Well, that may mean God's; and therefore you are stewards, as the whole parable that precedes the text has been teaching. But I am not sure that that is the only, nor indeed the principal reference of the word here. And I think when our Lord speaks of all outward possessions as being, even whilst mine, another's, He means to point there, not only to the fact of stewardship, but also to the fact of the limitations and defects of all outward possessions of outward good. That is to say, there is no real contact between the outward things that a man has and himself. The only things that you really have, paradox as it sounds, are the things that you *are*. All the rest you hold by a very slight tie, like the pearls that are sewn upon some half-barbarous Eastern magnate's jacket, which he shakes off as he walks. So men say, "This is mine!" and it only means "it is not yours." There is no real possession, even while there is an apparent one, and just because there is no real contact, because there is always a gap between the man and his goods, because he has not, as it were, gathered them into himself, therefore the possession is transient as well as incomplete. It slips away from the hand even whilst you hold it. And just as we may say, "There is no present, but everything is past or future, and what we call the present is only the meeting point of these two times," so we may say, there is no possession, because everything is either coming into my hands or going out of them, and my apparent ownership is only for a moment. I simply transmit :—

> "'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands."

And so it passes.

And then consider the common accidents of life which rob men of their goods, and the waste by the very act of use, which gnaws them away as the sea does the cliffs; and, last of all, death's separation. What can be taken out of a man's hands by death has no right to be called his. Other men will stand in this pulpit that I call mine, other men will sit in those pews that you call yours. I have got books on my shelves that have dead men's names in them; what of truth and wisdom they draw from the books is in them to-day wherever they are, and is theirs, but the book that was theirs was never theirs really. It is mine to-day, it will be somebody else's to-morrow. Each, for the moment, says "Mine!" and Christ says "No! no! Another's!" That which is your own is that which you can gather into your heart and keep there, and which death cannot take away from you.

So let us learn how to compare the worth of these two kinds of riches, and to make our own that from which "neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any creature shall be able to separate us."

II.—Notice for a moment the other broad principle that is laid down in these three verses, as to the highest use of the lower good.

Our Lord, as I have said in my introductory remarks, distinctly asserts here, as a principle, that our manner of employing the lesser goods of outward possession is an element in determining the amount of our possession of the highest blessing. And as I said, good people are sometimes chary of asserting that with the plain emphasis with which it is here asserted, for fear they should damage the central truth that God's mercy and the gifts of His grace come to men through faith, not through their conduct. I believe that, of course, as being the fundamental principle on which all other of these statements of Scripture must be explained, with which they must be harmonised; and nothing I have to say, and nothing I am sure that Jesus Christ wished to say, militates in the slightest degree against that truth, that a man receives into his heart "the true riches" simply on condition of his desiring them and of his trusting Jesus Christ to give them.

If I had to speak to a man that had no Christian character about him and no Christian faith in him, I should not begin by saying to him—"Use your outward goods faithfully and well, and then you will get the highest good," if for no other reason, yet for this, that I do not suppose he *could* use them faithfully and well unless he *had* the highest good, which comes to him by faith.

But that being understood, to say that a man's conduct may help or hinder him towards the possession and in the exercise of the faith which is the condition of his possessing the true riches and highest good, is no contradiction to the central truth of the Gospel. And that is what Jesus Christ says here. Whether you are a Christian man or whether you are not, this is true about you, that the way in which you deal with your outward goods, your wealth, your capacity of all sorts, may become a barrier to your possessing the higher, or it may become a mighty help.

There are plenty of people, and some of them listening to me now, who are kept from being Christians because they love the world so much. They have no desires after God or goodness, because their desires are engrossed and absorbed in the earthly and visible. They so handle that "which is least" that it has taken from them all the wish for that which is greatest. They have lived upon sweetmeats until their appetite is so entirely vitiated that they do not want bread. Like some sea-anemone that gathers in its tentacles and shuts itself up over its prey, so that you cannot shove a bristle into the lips, your hearts may close over your earthly good in such a fashion, so tight, and desperate, and obstinate, that God's grace and His proffered gifts have no chance of finding their way into your hearts at all. There are some of you of whom that is true to-day.

And is it not true about many Christians that their too high estimate of, and too great carefulness about, and too niggardly disposal of, the things that perish, the goods of this lower life, are hindering their Christian career? "Ye did run well, what did hinder you?" I will tell you what is hindering a great many of you—what hindered the runners in that old Grecian legend, when she whom they were pursuing cast down in the path a golden apple, and they turned aside and slackened their pace to catch at that. Old men, who as Christians are almost dead, and who can remember that, as young men, before they had got on in the world, they were full of earnest desires and self-sacrificing love to Jesus Christ—are there any of that sort here this morning? Christian men and women who do not use their wealth for the highest purposes and under the highest responsibilities—are there any of that sort here? Have you loaded your souls with thick clay, and held the world so close to your eyes, that though it be "that which is least" it is big enough to shut out that which is most, and which lies beyond? Oh! my brother! It is a very solemn truth, and you had better find room for it in your creed, that a great many Christians are hindered in their possession of the highest good by their unfaithful use of the lowest.

The world thinks that the highest use of the highest things is to gain possession of the lowest thereby, and that truth and genius and poetry are given to select spirits and are wasted unless they make money out of them. Christ's notion of the relationship is exactly the opposite, that all the outward is then lifted to its noblest purpose when it is made rigidly subordinate to the highest; and that the best thing that any man can do with his money is so to spend it as to "purchase for himself a good degree," "laying up for himself in store a good foundation that he may lay hold on eternal life."

III.—And now let me say one last word as to the faithfulness which thus utilises the lowest as a means of possessing more fully the highest.

We are not at all left in doubt as to what is the manner of thus employing the lowest gifts. Our text is our Lord's pointing the lesson of the striking parable of the unjust steward. I gather from it, as well as from other general considerations, these three words which I desire to leave with you as being the principles upon which this faithful use of the lowest class of goods is to be carried out.

You will be "faithful" if, through all your administration of your possessions, there runs, first, the principle of stewardship; you will be "faithful" if through all your administration of your earthly possessions there runs, second, the principle of sacrifice; you will be "faithful" if through all your administration of your earthly possessions there runs, third, the principle of brotherhood.

Stewardship.—The consciousness of having nothing that we have not received, of having received nothing for our very own to be used according to our own will, the ever-present sense of obligation to administer our master's goods as he would, and for his purposes, must be clear and active in us if we are to be "faithful." "Of Thine own have we given Thee" is to be always our conviction, for all is God's—His before it was ours, His whilst it seems ours, and His by a new right when we give it back to Him.

One of the plainest duties of stewardship is that we bring conscience and deliberate consideration to bear upon our administration of this world's goods. We are not faithful stewards if we spend according to our own whim and fancy, and let our "charity" depend, as it so often does, on little better than accident or habit. We are stewards in regard to what we spend on ourselves and our families, as well as in what we spend for purposes beyond ourselves; our personal and domestic expenditure, our savings and our gifts, and the proportion between them should all equally pass under the inspection of deliberate conscience. If that were once thoroughly understood and practised by us, we should be very different people, and there would be very different results from many an appeal that is made to us. Stewardship means deliberation, and intelligent consideration, and conscientious disposal and administration as of a fund that is not mine, but is put into my hand.

Sacrifice.—That is the fundamental law of the Christian life, and it must be applied especially in this region of outward possessions, where the opposite law of selfishness works most strongly. How much owest thou unto thy Lord? All things, and "thine own self besides." So, touched by the mercies of God, we should bring in glad surrender ourselves, and our all as thank-offerings to Him by Whose bitter sacrifice we are reconciled to God, and put in possession of ourselves and of all else. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive riches."

Brotherhood.—Christianity is not communism, but it will do all that communism tries to do. Property is not theft, but property selfishly administered is theft. We are but distributing agents and we have a right to take a commission and to support ourselves and families, but we have no right to do anything more. What we call our own is in this sense, too, another's, and belongs to our brethren, because it, and they, and we all belong to God. We get everything in order that we may transmit it to others. We are all bound together by such subtle and close ties that each is laid under obligation to share his portion with his neighbour. Whether it be outward goods or faculties of the mind or heart, wisdom, or sympathy, or the yet higher gifts of the Gospel that redeems, we receive that we may impart—

> "The least flower with a brimming cup may stand
> And share its dewdrop with another near."

These three principles of stewardship, sacrifice and brotherhood, honestly applied, will make us "faithful," and will make us capable of fuller possession of the true riches which God ever gives as largely as we can receive. Here and now we may win a greater possession of the love and likeness of God, and may have our spirits widened to receive more of all that makes us noble and calm, hopeful and strong, by our Christian administration of earthly goods. And on the other hand, we may so mis-spend, mis-love, and mis-administer them as that they shall be a clog to keep us down and a mist to blind our eyes, that we may not rise to behold the "King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off."

Nor does the effect end with earth. Faithful stewardship, like all other true conduct based upon the love of

Jesus Christ, will make us more capable of a larger possession of the life and the glory of God hereafter. It may have been some earnest Christian worker, who, like one that some of us mourn to-day, with little of this world's goods to give, has gone into some neglected neighbourhood and there, with sympathy and effort and prayer, has laboured; and has been laid in his grave amidst the weeping of those he had helped and of the drunkards he had reformed. Or, it may have been a prince, who, like one that all England is mourning to-day, did the duties of his high station, as we have reason to hope, from high motive and under the influence of Christian principle.* It may have been a poor workman who spent his fifteen shillings a week for God's glory, and as a steward; or it may have been a millionaire who gave largely out of his abundance to God's cause. But whoever they were, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours and their works do follow them."

> "Their works and alms, and all their good endeavour,
> Stayed not behind nor in the grave were trod,
> But as Faith pointed with her golden rod,
> Followed them up to bliss and joy for ever."

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* Duke of Albany (April, 1884).